CULTIVATING EMPIRES:
ENVIRONMENT, EXPERTISE, AND SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE IN
LATE OTTOMAN AND FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

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By

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CULTIVATING EMPIRES: ENVIRONMENT, EXPERTISE, AND SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE IN LATE OTTOMAN AND FRENCH MANDATE SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

The transition from the Ottoman Empire to post-World War I mandate states in the Middle East coincided with the emergence of agricultural technologies and the development of new strategies of rule and conceptions of expertise considered integral to their practice. Given agriculture’s centrality to the economy of the region which would become the nation states of Syria and Lebanon, implementing these technologies was a stated priority for both the Ottoman and mandate governments. Using these historical developments as a lens, this dissertation examines contrasting strategies of imperial rule as exemplified through policies related to processes of agrarian change. By tracing circulations of expertise regarding these technologies and practices through actors involved in global, imperial, and local networks, it also investigates the intellectual and practical continuities and divergences in French, Ottoman, and Syrian technocratic approaches to environmental management, the impacts of these imperial policies on local rural communities, and these communities’ responses.

By tracing continuities in the policies and networks of actors involved in the process of agrarian change and systematically analyzing the institutional developments that characterized the shift from the late Ottoman period through the mandate, this dissertation challenges prevailing periodizations. It also assesses, within a spatially-sensitive framework, how the officials of these two imperial powers differentially viewed the region’s environmental and agricultural importance to their imperial priorities and compares this with the perspectives of
local technocrats, peasants, farmers, and landowners. In its focus on rural developments and cultivating communities, the dissertation aspires to respond to major lacunae in the historiography, which has primarily focused on urban spaces and elite actors during this period. Not only does it highlight the dynamics of rural change, but it traces the circulation of a variety of actors between rural and urban spaces and interrogates notions of modernity, science, and progress as they were articulated through policies of rural administration and agricultural change. Despite common imperial ambitions to exploit agricultural resources, different approaches to imperial rule, concepts of expertise, and management of the environment produced divergent results.
I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents,
Alan and Blanche Williams
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A WORD ON TRANSLITERATIONS AND DATES

In choosing a system of transliteration I have tried to make the work accessible for non-specialist readers. For Arabic transliterations, I use the IJMES system without diacritics except for the ‘ayn and hamza. For Ottoman transliterations I have used modern Turkish.

Most of the Ottoman documents I use contain Rumi and Hicri dates. In most cases, I have opted to include the Rumi date along with its conversion into the equivalent Miladi date in the footnotes.
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**INTRODUCTION**

Globally during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, technological developments related to agriculture triggered a series of innovations in institutional arrangements and spurred global collaborations as administrative technocrats, large landowners, and some well-off farmers sought to harness what they saw as the transformative and lucrative promises of these new inventions and methods. For the eastern Mediterranean this period would also coincide with a fundamental alteration of the region’s space, redefining political boundaries and reorienting its economy as it went from being integrated provinces of the Ottoman Empire to mandate states under British and French control, a remapping which would have long-lasting repercussions. This transition would also have consequences for the region’s agricultural production and the wealth extracted from it, both as a result of demands made of farmers working in often fragile environments and in terms of infrastructural developments affecting the agrarian sphere. Ottoman and Syrian technocrats and French mandate officials both viewed the region as ripe for expanding and increasingly more intensive cultivation, which would be aided by new technologies and additional infrastructure. Emphasizing the revenue-producing possibilities of the region’s agriculture, they all variously articulated visions for how they could best exploit its environments to realize these possibilities. Both Ottoman and mandate governments experimented with a variety of strategies to exert greater control over agricultural production and its revenues. To explain and justify these policies, they emphasized the capacity of scientific practice and technology to facilitate environmental management. Despite claims to exerting more control, however, the actual application of these methods and technologies in the process of managing the environment would itself prove to be the most important source of knowledge production.
The intersection of science and technology with environmental management, particularly as it relates to agricultural production and its affiliated infrastructures, has characterized imperial rule for centuries. The centrality of conceptions of scientific practice and its application to projects of improvement or development, particularly those involving the natural world and associated with the process of imperial expansion, have been well-documented since the eighteenth century.\(^1\) The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw imperial officials increasingly asserting their capacity to use science and technology to shape and manage nature and the environment as a justification and explanation of their dominance and exploitation of other regions.\(^2\) Colonial states constructed and oriented the material manifestations of this technological infrastructure—railroads, telegraphs, water systems, and of course agricultural production—to facilitate extraction and serve metropole interests.\(^3\)

This process involved not only creating local, colonial infrastructures, it also entailed creating an imperially-integrated grid with global reach. As Manu Goswami has argued with respect to India “the colonial state space was inseparably part of a broader imperial scale-making project, one that sought to secure and maintain a Britain-centered and globe-spanning imperial economy.”\(^4\) A key component of this project was the production of a colonial state space through a grid of technologies that realigned the space between the local and the global sphere. The more efficient and remunerative exploitation of agricultural production for the colonial power’s

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economic needs was at the heart of much of this infrastructure, necessitating the deployment of
an array of technologies ranging from surveying, tax collection, and railroads to technical
education and irrigation schemes. Such infrastructure tended to accompany policies aimed at
expanding and facilitating the increased production of cash crops such as cotton in Egypt. As
this grid expanded and grew in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, Hodge has argued
that the imperial power’s use of science became progressively more tied to the state as
“governments…turned increasingly to scientific expertise to deal with the problems of capitalist
production, resource management, and social order.” With respect to agriculture-related
developments, there was also a difference in the eventual scale of production implied by
technologies emerging towards the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, new discoveries
in chemistry as well as increasingly more mechanized equipment in the early twentieth century
theoretically, at least, promised far more extensive returns. At the same time their results could
be catastrophic if they were used in ecologies where their impacts were untried and unknown.
Nonetheless, the eventual abundance associated with these new technologies suggested a
Malthusian catastrophe need never be a concern again; more prosaically, officials were attracted
by the better returns they anticipated for the treasury—a promise of particular relevance where
the tax base was still largely agrarian.

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5 See for example Goswami, *Producing*, 53-55, 73-153. Among the technologies she discusses are statistics
collection, survey making, budget publication, centralization of taxation, and railroads as well as the educational
programs established to train students in many of these practices. See also Headrick, *Tentacles*.
6 Headrick, *Tentacles*, 196-204; Jennifer L. Derr, “Drafting a Map of Colonial Egypt: The 1902 Aswan Dam,
Historical Imagination, and the Production of Agricultural Geography,” in *Environmental Imaginaries of the Middle
136-157.
8 See for example, Donald Worster, *Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
2004) where inexperience with using tractors in the southern plains led to the Dust Bowl.
Empire, Environment, and Agriculture

In delineating the impacts of imperial rule on environment management and agriculture-related policies, the majority of scholarship has tended to focus on European empires, particularly that of the British. The Ottoman Empire has received some attention in scholarship examining questions of environmental management, but only through the early nineteenth century. Yet Ottoman use of science and technology in the formulation of state projects and strategies of rule related to agriculture and the environment from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century poses an interesting point of comparison to these other imperial contexts. To continue to trace these trends through the mandate period provides yet another instructive contrast. While such projects or administrators’ use of these discourses has been almost entirely neglected, some work has engaged the concept of development, although it has done so with a focus primarily on urban spheres. Jacob Norris’s work, for instance, provides some insight into continuities between the late Ottoman and mandate period in Palestine within what he argues is the framework of “colonial development.” Simon Jackson, meanwhile, has looked at development under French mandate rule, but much remains to be done when looking at these in relation to questions involving the rural sphere, agricultural change, and associated environmental management.

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In contrast to the paucity of work on the late Ottoman or French mandate periods, a number of historians have examined the agricultural or environmental management policies of imperial British colonial rule in rural South Asia as well as French colonial rule in North Africa. Works on British rule in South Asia range from more longue durée studies to works about specific irrigation projects or famine under colonial rule. This diverse array of studies suggest how colonial rule reoriented agricultural productivity and led, at times catastrophically, to uneven access to its fruits, both food-wise and financial.\(^\text{13}\)

Histories of environmental and agricultural management in French North Africa have underscored colonial misconceptions of the local environment and the legacies of dispossession wrought by policies of environmental management premised on these misconceptions. In Morocco Swearingen has traced the impacts of French agricultural policies under the protectorate, which turned from an obsession with grain production inspired by the region’s granary of Rome reputation into an emphasis on garden crops and citrus for export. Furthermore, many of the peasants dispossessed as a result of these policies found their plight unaltered by independence as local elites continued to pursue the fulfillment of colonial-era projects.\(^\text{14}\) Diana Davis meanwhile has examined how French colonial officials used a declensionist narrative alleging irresponsible environmental stewardship to justify dispossessing local pastoral groups of land in North Africa. These representations have had a lasting impact as they continue to be

referenced in reports about the region by NGOs and the UN.\textsuperscript{15} Drawn primarily from the writings of French policy makers, scientists, or administrators, their proposals, the ideologies behind them, and the results they produced, this work leaves open the possibility to incorporate more reactions and resistances from local actors, whether communities of pastoralists or peasants, or even local elites who often benefitted from the former’s dispossession, unfiltered through the pens of foreign officials.\textsuperscript{16}

In contrast to this relatively well-developed body of literature on British and French imperial approaches to agriculturally exploiting environments under colonial rule in South Asia and North Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the absence of such work on the Ottoman Empire represents an opportunity to offer an instructive comparative case.\textsuperscript{17} Certainly, agricultural production was a key source of colonial wealth and the practice of “scientific” agriculture would be used to justify European colonial intervention, but official enthusiasm for it prevailed in other imperial contexts as well. In the Ottoman Empire, implementing “scientific” agriculture practice and expanding the institutional and administrative infrastructure considered necessary for its implementation was also a priority for imperial planners by the nineteenth century. Yet, its imperial strategies in this sphere—what Burbank and Cooper identify as imperial “repertoires of power”—provide a counterpoint to that of British and French imperial administrative repertoires.\textsuperscript{18} In particular, by comparing the ways in which Ottoman imperial rule built agricultural infrastructure and oriented the grid of technologies that would facilitate agriculture’s exploitation with that of French mandate rule, which would be imposed on the

\textsuperscript{16} Davis, \textit{Granary}; Swearingen, \textit{Moroccan Mirages}.
eastern Mediterranean during the interwar period, I demonstrate the constitutive intersection of different imperial approaches to agriculturally exploiting the environment with the formation of imperial/state space and the ways it shaped and was shaped by the relationships between various imperial state and local actors.

From its place within the primarily land-based Ottoman Empire to its incorporation within the sea-based French one, the eastern Mediterranean, which had been integrated, provincial units within the Ottoman space, after World War I came under a new regime of governance, the mandate system. What can examining these different empires’ approaches to rural administration and environmental management tell us about the relationship between the imperial and the local? Some scholars have argued for understanding Ottoman rule, especially in the empire’s peripheral regions such as its predominantly Arabic-speaking provinces, as akin to European forms of colonial governance. Ussama Makdisi posits an “Ottoman Orientalism” to characterize Ottoman rule in Mt. Lebanon, while Selim Deringil uses the framework of “borrowed colonialism” to describe Ottoman rule in Libya.19

Recent work that has examined more closely the interactions between Ottoman officials, provincial powerholders, and local communities suggests, however, that Ottoman rule, even within peripheral areas, while drawing on some aspects of shared imperial repertoires, actually worked from fundamentally different assumptions.20 Thomas Kühn, for example, argues for understanding an Ottoman politics of difference in Yemen that sought “to accommodate local

particularity in ways that would give the local people a stake in Ottoman rule without undermining it.”

In the Hijaz region, Mostafa Minawi has demonstrated that the use of superficially “orientalizing” language used by Ottoman administrators was strategic rhetoric that did not imply the same deterministic, temporal difference as that of European colonialism. I contribute to this discussion by analyzing Ottoman approaches to infrastructure building associated with new agricultural developments and rural, environmental management in the empire’s predominantly Arabic-speaking provinces and the discourses that accompanied them. I ask what these policies and rhetoric demonstrate about Ottoman repertoires of rule and how this contrasts with those of the French mandate rule that followed it.

The mandate system, notably, contained a number of caveats that made the governance it imposed distinct from existing forms of colonial rule. While the mandate in Syria and Lebanon technically acknowledged the mandated regions’ populations’ desire for future independence and forbid colonial settlement, it nonetheless facilitated a variant of colonial rule. The mandate’s charter insisted that the mandated powers could not prevent other members of the League of Nations from pursuing economic activities in the mandated territories, but these measures were aimed more at protecting the interests of other League members, than they were at facilitating some form of economic independence for the mandated regions. Despite these distinctions many of the mandate’s administrators had honed their skills in other areas of the French empire, particularly in North Africa, and they brought these repertoires with them—in particular, Khoury

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22 Minawi, “Beyond Rhetoric,” 100.
24 Khoury, *Syria*, 89.
identifies the French experience in Morocco as most influential on their approach to ruling the region under mandate.  

Thus while mandatory policies to some degree reflected the idiosyncratic nature of this newly-devised system of colonial rule, French administrators referenced practices and strategies of rule from other areas of the French imperial sphere as they articulated them. In contrast to French protectorates and colonies, not to mention the metropole, French investors were less willing to invest in a region where French rule was considered intrinsically transient and where they were technically required to compete with other nations’ economic interests. As a result, French officials treated the question of agricultural change and environmental management in the metropole one way, its colonies and protectorates in another, and the mandate in yet another.

This study challenges dominant periodizations in the literature, which have tended to treat the Ottoman period and the mandate period separately. A number of recent works have shown the value of tracing continuities and divergences in rural institutions or resource management over time periods distinguished by changes in political regimes. In the eastern Mediterranean, examining the shifts in imperial rule related to rural administration, agriculture, and environment over a timespan during which the technologies of agricultural practice and the institutions for managing rural environments and infrastructure were also rapidly changing provides a depth of perspective on the continuities involved in the process of rural “development,” but also demonstrates how changes in imperial rule impacted its trajectory.


In addition to “repertoires of power,” Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper have offered a number of helpful frameworks for thinking about how different empires have approached the process of imperial rule. These include “imperial intersections,” “imperial imaginaries,” and “imperial intermediaries.”²⁸ In what follows I suggest ways of thinking about these themes that provide instructive avenues of analysis and assessment for understanding the continuities and divergences between late Ottoman imperial rule and that of the French mandate. Namely, I consider the question of “imperial intersections” through an examination of the networks involving transfers of knowledge about scientific agricultural practice and operating at the global, imperial, and local levels. I use the framework of “imperial imaginaries” to think about how the imperial contexts and intellectual formation of technocrats and administrators contributed to certain representations of rural communities and the production of knowledge around emerging agricultural methods and technologies. Finally, the theme of “imperial intermediaries” informs my analysis of emerging connections between urban and rural spaces involving new technocratic modes of governance and the actors engaged in implementing them. Through an analysis of these aspects of imperial rule during a period of rapid global technological change and local political change, I elucidate the dynamics that shaped divergent imperial approaches to agricultural-related environmental management policies and rural administration.

Networks

If imperial approaches to exploiting environmental and agricultural resources differed, there were nonetheless continuities in the ideas technocrats shared about the infrastructure that was necessary for implementing new agriculture-related technologies and methods. Much of this

²⁸ Burbank and Cooper, Empires, 13-16.
knowledge was transmitted through a variety of networks that operated at the global, imperial and local levels. How did these networks function to disseminate knowledge and expertise and what kinds of continuities can be demonstrated by tracing individual actors in these networks from the Ottoman period through the mandate? Locating these diverse actors in global and imperial networks highlights, on the one hand, the circulations of common technocratic expertise in which they participated and, on the other hand, elucidates how, despite these shared networks, different imperial interests and the particularities of individual backgrounds led to divergent translations of these ideas into administrative policies and practice.

By focusing on these actors and their circulation in imperial and global networks, I highlight the role of participants in the late Ottoman and French mandate periods whose contributions to shaping rural administrative and agricultural policies have thus far been largely absent from the literature. Recent scholarship, most notably Jens Hanssen’s work on Beirut and Keith Watenpaugh’s work on Aleppo has begun to elucidate the dynamics of imperial rule in the eastern Mediterranean during this period, but their focus had been primarily urban.29 I expand on their contributions by examining the increasing involvement of a number of urban-based actors with connections to global and imperial networks in the rural countryside and, to the extent possible, the response of rural actors. By tracing these connections and their impacts on rural policies, I ask how can they help us understand the formation of local technocratic approaches to policies of agriculture-related environmental management during this period? What can they elucidate about the intellectual and practical continuities and divergences between the late Ottoman period and that of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon?

Emphasizing the role played by these technocratic elites in government policy-making and administration highlights the activities of a group of actors that have thus far been largely invisible in the literature. Typically occupying positions less prestigious than provincial governors, government ministers, elite families, or nationalist notables, their crucial role in implementing imperial governance has tended to be overlooked and undervalued.\textsuperscript{30} Whether of local origin or assigned to the area from more far afield regions of the empire, examining their participation in policies implemented in the service of technocratic governance at the local level in the eastern Mediterranean brings to light the increasing prestige attributed to what official rhetoric deemed a more “scientific” approach to cultivation during the later Ottoman period.\textsuperscript{31} The Ottoman government increasingly relied on these officials with their “scientific” training to carry out administrative policies.

Tracing the intellectual and practical involvement of the administrators and technocrats engaged in these networks is essential to understanding continuities between the Ottoman and mandate periods. Yet during the mandate period as well the role played by these officials is invisible in the literature as most of it is written almost exclusively from documentation produced by nationalist elites or French officials.\textsuperscript{32} This focus has obscured the important pre-mandate connections that characterized local technocratic administrators’ desired approaches to

\textsuperscript{30} For the most part educated and well-off, many of these men were quite influential in the technocratic circles in which they circulated even if they were not the most wealthy or influential politically, resulting in their relative absence in the literature. Even one who has appeared with some frequency, such as Hüseyin Kazım, who I will deal with in greater depth below, has been hard-pressed to have the technocratic nature of his policies acknowledged.


policy even if many of their proposals were often foiled by the conflicting priorities of French mandate administrators. The movement of these technocratic administrators from their offices and classrooms to the villages of the countryside, the establishment of connections with peasant communities based on the transfer of “scientific” knowledge, and the response of these communities to technocratic proposals decades before the agrarian development programs of the 40s and 50s adds a depth of perspective to the involvement of local administrators in projects they claimed were aimed at rural development and peasant enlightenment.  

By locating these technocrats in networks from the late Ottoman period, I also explore the deeper roots of agriculture-related policies pursued during the mandate and contextualize them in debates about administrative strategies—especially given new agricultural developments—that were underway in the late Ottoman period both imperially and globally. On the one hand, Ottoman technocrats were interested in the possibilities promised by new technologies but wary of applying techniques developed in other ecologies directly to the different environments of the empire. A process of translation literally and figuratively was necessary, thus the state’s program to establish a network of model fields throughout the empire and technocratic initiatives to examine knowledge from a diverse array of sources, involving not only travel to France, Germany, North Africa, and the United States, but also the Anatolian countryside among other places.  

Local administrators also advocated policies of rural economic and social reform, which they considered necessary to facilitate a more capital-intensive agriculture, but which could also

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34 See for example Kazım’s introduction to his translation of a book on agriculture written by Eugène Leroux, a French author. Hüseyin Kazım, *İlm-i Ziraat* (Tanin Matbaası, 1911 [1327]) and Eugène Leroux, *Cours d’agriculture* (Paris: G. Masson 1896, 1906 (3rd ed.)). Kazım indicates that he was unable to translate the book directly into Ottoman, rather he had to alter it to suit “our agriculture methods” (*İlm*, 4).
be seen as efforts at greater state centralization. Proposed “scientific” methods of agricultural practice tended to be capital-intensive and officials insisted that capital investment necessitated changes to land tenure, especially with regard to commonly-held land, new banking institutions that were responsive to nature’s unpredictable vicissitudes, and new tax regimes sensitive to the lower net revenues that this investment would occasion. As a result, Ottoman and local administrators advocated policies and began the process of establishing infrastructures aimed at encouraging these methods as well as more centralized control over agricultural production.

Tracing these developments through the mandate raises a number of questions. How did these administrative strategies and technocratic initiatives change under French mandate rule? How did attempts under the French mandate to mediate between the local and the global contrast with Ottoman imperial practice? In what way did French officials’ circulation in their own imperial networks inform their perception of the local, filtered as it was through their understandings of metropole experiences regarding rural developments as well as imperial practice in other regions of the French empire such as North Africa? By delineating these changes, I elucidate on the one hand how French mandate rule differently shaped circulations between center-periphery and local state space. In addition, by highlighting the influences that informed French policymakers’ thinking, I examine the role their formation and experiences elsewhere played in their justifications for certain approaches to environmental and agricultural management and why this contrasted with the strategies considered most essential by their local interlocutors.

Examining the projects and proposals of French colonial officials alongside those of the officials who composed the Ottoman bureaucracy that preceded them as well as those put forth

by local technocrats and government officials during the mandate enables a comparative assessment of multiple approaches to managing the environment as well as consideration of the power dynamics that allowed certain policies to prevail. This inclusion of alternative viewpoints throws mandate policies into relief and suggests other paths not taken as a result of colonial interventions in the environments of the eastern Mediterranean.

Ottoman, Syrian, and French technocrats, as participants in global networks, tended to advocate similar projects regarding the kinds of reforms necessary to facilitate the administration of “scientific” agricultural practices for the Ottoman Empire, Bilad al-Sham, and France respectively. But their approaches on the local level in Bilad al-Sham in particular differed based on how these various administrators conceptualized its productive capacity in relation to their imperial or national priorities. Projects that had been in the process of execution in the late Ottoman period and largely resumed under the Faysal government immediately post-World War I were largely halted under the mandate as networks of technocrats with different approaches to administering imperial and state space imposed their visions on the region’s governance.36

Modernity, Science, and Expertise

In addition to tracing the movement of actors through these networks and the ways in which they translated technocratic ideas into practice, I also aim to demonstrate how this process produced certain concepts of modernity, science, and expertise. How did those circulating in these networks conceive or justify certain policies using particular claims about expertise, modernity, science, or progress? How did these concepts overlap and intersect? What kinds of omissions or elisions did the production of claims to modernity, science, or expertise entail?

Timothy Mitchell argues that “the questioning of modernity must explore two forms of
difference, both the displacements opened up by the different space of the non-West, and the
ways in which this space is made to appear different.”

Taking this observation into consideration, I ask what claims about “modernity” used in relation to environmental
management and agricultural practices can reveal about the production of this space and how it
differed during the late Ottoman period from that of the French mandate.

In addition to representations of “modernity,” what did designations of “science” or
“scientific” practice imply? Although administrators, scientists and other officials were keen to
assert and demonstrate their dominance of nature, new technologies in their encounter with the
idiosyncrasies of different environments did not always work as anticipated. Mitchell has
suggested elsewhere that “the projects themselves formed the science.”

Indeed while administrators did consider book learning a key component of accessing scientific expertise,
when it came to agriculture a number of them were quite explicit about the uselessness of this
information without further experimentation in model fields. Application in nature that combined
local knowledge of the environment and experimentation with new technologies were essential
to this production of scientific expertise. But this insistence on a scientific expertise that
combined the work in the field with words on a page and could be distinguished as a practice
from existing forms of knowledge acquisition about agriculture created a form of “distinction”

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39 See chapter 2.
that now denoted it as a particularly prestigious kind of knowledge—one that could be shared among networks of globetrotting technocrats.\textsuperscript{40}

Tracing these trends from the Ottoman period into the mandate period, I ask how did global historical changes and different approaches to imperial governance shape discourses and elite projects? While claims to modernity figured into the competing perspectives of different actors, what it represented to each of them varied widely. As Frederick Cooper has argued, analyzing “modernity” as a concept is most effective and revelatory when it is “sensitive to the different ways people frame the relationship between past, present, and future, an understanding of the situations and conjunctures that enable and disable particular representations, and a focus on process and causation in the past and on choice, political organization, responsibility, and accountability in the future.”\textsuperscript{41} In contrast to Watenpaugh who has examined claims to modernity as a middle class, urban phenomenon in late Ottoman and French mandate Aleppo, measuring them against an ideal of European bourgeois modernity, I ask how are claims to modernity functioning in specific struggles over rural resources, environmental management, and the production of knowledge?\textsuperscript{42} In this vein, my analysis seeks to understand how different actors constructed claims about modernity in response to specific historical changes, as well as the slippages and “translations” involved in producing these claims. Contextualizing these claims within the global, imperial, and local networks through which they circulated and the practices this engendered highlights the intricacies and multivalent nature of this circulation.

Examining the role played by these claims in environment and agriculture-centered contexts can also provide instructive analytical purchase on some of the most stubbornly


\textsuperscript{41} Cooper, \textit{Colonialism}, 149.

\textsuperscript{42} Watenpaugh, \textit{Being Modern}.
persistence representations of agricultural practice in the region. Understanding what is at stake in these representations of the environment or claims to the capacity to master it enables an exploration of the underlying logic of transformation and what references to modernity vis-à-vis tradition are actually asserting and advocating.\textsuperscript{43} Scholars who have traced representations of scientific agricultural practice in Egypt have offered insightful analyses of how the colonial context of British-occupied Egypt produced translations and instrumental representations at the intersection of colonial rule and nationalist projects. Omnia el-Shakry for example has argued that “Egyptian intellectuals and social reformers attempted to render models of modernity intelligible,” included those involving projects related to land and agriculture through a process of “translation.”\textsuperscript{44} Michael Gasper, on the other hand, has examined the ways in which the Egyptian intelligentsia incorporated scientific agriculture into representations of “the peasant” in order to “articulate[] a vision of Egypt’s future while positioning themselves socially and politically in Egypt’s present.”\textsuperscript{45} Both of these scholars highlight the instrumental nature of articulations of rural development for elite projects of reform and nation-building.

The prominence of scientific or modern agriculture among elite nationalist projects and discourses, I would argue, can be traced to new technologies, including technologies of rule, which would facilitate additional connections between the state and rural areas. Examining the divergent ways in which representations of rural communities manifested in elite projects and discourses in the different political and ecological environments of Ottoman-governed Bilad al-Sham and Anatolia during the same period provides an instructive contrast with Egypt. Just like

\textsuperscript{44} Omnia El-Shakry, \textit{The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 5-10.
the elites discussed by Gasper, those in Anatolia and Bilad al-Sham shared an enthusiasm for scientific agriculture and the mediating role it would play between them and peasant communities.\textsuperscript{46} Taking into account the technological, environmental, and infrastructural contexts in which officials embedded these representations also offers fresh insight into the explanations suggested by “Ottoman Orientalism” or “borrowed colonialism.”\textsuperscript{47} In particular, examining the Ottoman representations of science and modernity that accompanied administrative strategies in rural areas alongside those used by French mandate officials highlights their distinct frameworks and references points for understanding the degree, if any, of temporal or civilizational difference embodied by the empire’s rural inhabitants in its more peripheral provinces.

**The Urban-Rural Connection**

Finally, while most of the technocrats and administrators I discuss were urban-based, their activities forged new connections between urban and rural actors and their proposed policies had the potential to reshape rural communities, their rights to their land, their exposure to capital exploitation, and their relation to the state. Works about rural areas of the region during the late Ottoman period albeit few in number provide detailed, rigorous insights into the consequences of Ottoman efforts to administer new property laws and expand the frontier,

\textsuperscript{46} I have focused my research on both archival and periodical sources and have therefore not been able to examine the press in Ottoman Bilad al-Sham or Anatolia as exhaustively as Gasper did in Egypt. On another note, this elite enthusiasm seems to have been shared by elites elsewhere as well, although I have not had time to explore its particular manifestations more in-depth.

although they have tended to focus on parts of the region that would come under the British mandates during the interwar period.\textsuperscript{48}

A number of scholars have worked on aspects of urban-rural relations during the mandate period, but none have systematically addressed the broader frameworks or local implications for more technocratic approaches to rural governance. Khoury has highlighted the antagonistic relationship between peasants and landlords, which were exacerbated by mandate governing strategies.\textsuperscript{49} He explains French policies as motivated by “a mixture of traditional French idealism and political opportunism,” but does not discuss the continuities with the late Ottoman period, nor explore in greater depth the implications of mandate administrators’ use of their new taxation system to streamline revenue collection.\textsuperscript{50} While touted as a policy formulated to ensure more “just” rural taxation comparable to that in the metropole, the rigor and relative inflexibility with which officials implemented these policies led to an outcry against their injustice.\textsuperscript{51} While critiquing other aspects of French rule, Khoury’s focus on urban spaces and elite urban actors means that he does delve more deeply into the dynamics of this “equitable” rural taxation and does not examine more fully French officials’ denigration of existing methods of rotational cultivation practices, especially musha‘—a form of commonly-held lands—as “unproductive.”\textsuperscript{52}

Other authors have provided instructive perspectives on distinct aspects of peasant resistance and mandate attempts at control over rural areas. Batatu, for example, focuses on

\textsuperscript{49} Khoury, \textit{Syria}, 60-66.
\textsuperscript{50} Khoury, \textit{Syria}, 60.
\textsuperscript{51} James Scott has observed that “the distinctiveness of colonial taxes lay not so much in the fact that they were higher but in the nature of those taxes and the blind rigor with which they were imposed.” In the case of the mandate, it seems that they were substantially higher overall as well. James C. Scott, \textit{The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 92; see chapter 5.
\textsuperscript{52} Khoury, \textit{Syria}, 61-63.
peasant communities and identifies what he claims are distinct characteristics of different peasant societies in the region. These defining characteristics which he bases largely on geographical features—the “peasant mountaineers” versus “the peasants of the open plains” are then used to explain different forms of peasant resistance during both the Ottoman and mandate periods. Provence meanwhile has demonstrated the greater complexity that characterized the relationship between the peasants and shaykhs of the Hawran and the role these relationships played in the 1925-1927 Great Syrian Revolt. Neep’s work has emphasized the strategies of colonial control pursued by mandate rule in rural areas, including roads to facilitate control, irrigation systems to increase production, and the colonne, a military formation used to combat peasant resistance in rural areas such as the Ghouta. Thompson, meanwhile, focuses on urban actors, but stresses the need for a better understanding of rural dynamics during the mandate in order to trace how they evolved into post-mandate “rural movements.” Building on these authors’ contributions and suggestions, my work begins the process of examining the implications of new forms of urban-rural connections spurred by a more technocratic and state-centered approach to rural governance.

What can looking more closely at the projects that evolved around the concept of scientific agriculture tell us about these relations and the extent to which new technologies had the potential to fundamentally change them? What can it tell us about the role of local technocratic elites whose presence and ideas, in contrast to those of more prominent nationalist


54 Provence, *Revolt*.


elites, the actors in various urban-based social movements, and even certain peasant communities, have remained entirely unexplored? Finally, what more broadly were the implications of the post-World War I imperial shift for agricultural change in the region, rural communities, and their connections with urban-based actors?

Methodology and Sources

In tracing the networks of technocratic expertise that spanned the late Ottoman and French mandate periods, their administrative strategies and the institutional changes they engendered, I have used archival sources, periodicals, including both journals and newspapers, and published sources from the period such as dissertations. By using the Ottoman Prime Minister’s Archive and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive in Nantes in equal measure, I have attempted to give equivalent weight to both periods of history. My aim is to explore these processes in their own right during the Ottoman period and not merely to treat it as background to the mandate nor is it to treat the mandate period as a fraught epilogue to the Ottoman period: rather I aim to illustrate that while on one level there was continuity among certain administrators regarding efforts to manage the environment and establish certain agriculture institutions, the distinct political contexts of the Ottoman and mandate periods created key divergences in administration that would have lasting impacts on infrastructure in the region.

The Ottoman archives contain a vast trove of documents that detail the decisions and official logic that characterized provincial administration. Inspectors’ reports, telegrams, imperial orders and charts of depot supplies chronicle Ottoman efforts to construct and expand this infrastructure locally as well as their circulation in international and imperial networks. Many of
these documents were sent to Istanbul from officials based in the eastern Mediterranean. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs archives in Nantes, France meanwhile provide exhaustive detail on French administrative strategies, their perspective on local activities, and responses to local concerns through lengthy project proposals, correspondence, intelligence reports, and press summaries. Additional documentation from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Paris demonstrate the kinds of arguments being made to the metropole government in order to justify the mandate and urge the protection of French interests during it. Correspondence and reports from the US and UK national archives provide further alternative perspectives on developments.

Unfortunately, I was unable to access the Historical Documents Center in Damascus in the process of writing this dissertation. However, the journal *al-Zira'a al-Haditha [Modern Agriculture]*, which was published out of Hama during the mandate and which I accessed at the Bibliothèque Orientale in Beirut, as well as other sources from the Lebanese National Archives, have enabled me to reconstruct to some extent the policies and perspectives of Syrian government administrators during this period. Notably, they enabled me to trace crucial continuities between local technocratic perspectives and administrative policies from the Ottoman period. Periodicals in Ottoman and Arabic provided insight into the narrative justifications for the various aspects of agricultural change being advocated. Reading these documents alongside those of the archive provided additional context and continuity.

Chapter 1 examines the circulation of Ottoman officials in global, imperial, and local networks emerging around new agricultural technologies and practices. In particular, I explore Ottoman technocrats’ participation in international exhibitions, institutes, and other venues for disseminating the latest knowledge about scientific agriculture and trace how they translated
these experiences into suggestions for administrative practice, particularly those related to taxation, land tenure, and agricultural loan institutions, within the empire. I emphasize the actions of officials operating in the Bilad al-Sham, but locate them within the larger sphere of imperial priorities and the intersection of global networks of expertise and experimentation. I trace how officials’ engagement with these networks paralleled the emergence of “scientific agriculture” as a discourse among Ottoman technocrats, bureaucrats and local landowners as they sought to increase the prestige of agricultural practice, representing it as a “science” as worthy of investment as industry. I argue that by emphasizing agriculture’s “scientific” nature various actors aimed to encourage more state support, while state officials and technocrats saw the infrastructures of scientific agriculture as a means of pursuing policies of state centralization.

Chapter 2 looks more closely at the redefinitions of agricultural expertise that accompanied this process and the expansion of institutions in the Levant established to experiment with new technologies and convey knowledge of their use to rural communities. The language of “scientific” agriculture legitimated certain derivations/forms of agricultural knowledge over others. By highlighting local initiative particularly on the part of local elites, I demonstrate how the establishment of these institutions was not only a process of negotiation between center and periphery, but also a process of exclusion resulting from the production of new hierarchies of expertise at the local level. I conclude with a vignette from Aleppo of a provincial governor, whom I also discuss in chapter 1 in a more imperially-central role, assessing the state of economic and social challenges to implementing agricultural reform in the region a few years after the second constitutional revolution and evaluating its implications for projects of state centralization.
Chapter 3 examines the fate of these institutions during the war and changing technocratic perspectives in its aftermath. Despite harsh conditions and lack of labor, establishing agriculture-related institutions continued to be a priority for Ottoman administrators during the war. Following the region’s separation from an Ottoman imperial space in the aftermath of World War I and its incorporation into a French imperial sphere, priorities regarding agricultural production in the region shifted. This chapter sets the stage for examining this shift by comparing how French officials viewed the relevance of the local environment to their imperial needs, a view largely driven by French commercial interests and circulations of capital in the region with roots in the Ottoman period. It contrasts this perspective with local views, which were beginning to conceive of the region as a distinct state space and make arguments for local agricultural development accordingly.

Chapters 4 and 5 examine developments affecting agriculture-related institutions under the French mandate. Tracing these developments illustrates a counterpoint to the predominant narrative in French mandate historiography that highlights the proliferation of educational and other forms of institutionalization during the interwar period. In contrast, I argue that institutions related to agricultural exploitation, despite agricultural production being the primary source of revenue for the region, were systematically dismantled or “planned” into non-execution. Chapter 4 focuses on technical educational institutions. It commences by examining how French and local concepts of “scientific” expertise diverged and the local critique this generated. It then traces how mandate rule affected Ottoman-era networks of expertise-generating institutions. I argue that French officials championed a French–directed system of agricultural education and hierarchical expertise. Initially this position aimed to prevent other League of Nation members from gaining a corner on local markets related to new agricultural technologies, but gradually
their concern became more about preventing or limiting nationalist or foreign influence in rural areas. The chapter also suggests how local technocrats tried to circumvent the restraints these policies placed on them.

Chapter 5 emphasizes the intersection of environmental factors and strategies of mandate governance related to agriculture such as taxation policies, land tenure, and credit-lending institutions that resisted taking these factors into account. I examine the causes of mounting local discontent over the course of the 1920s and early 1930s when a combination of drought and other natural disasters combined with the global economic downturn—the consequences of which were exacerbated by mandate policies which stressed extraction of agricultural revenues—led to disaster in the agricultural sector. The chapter traces these developments alongside the proposals and critiques of nationalist, technocratic, often land-owning elites with claims to local scientific agricultural expertise. Typically trained through initiatives originating in the Ottoman period, they insisted on projects that would prioritize state support for and investment in agriculture as the means to make the agricultural sphere more remunerative for the national economy. These projects would in turn be a way for the state to establish a greater presence in rural areas. Examining the plans and projects of these officials underscores the continuities from the late Ottoman period that characterized administrative practices based on local knowledge of the environment, albeit still according to a differentiated hierarchy of expertise.

The introduction of new technologies and techniques into agricultural practice in the nineteenth century encouraged increasingly technocratic forms of governance to oversee their implementation through the establishment of new administrative strategies and educational institutions. Expertise produced through experimentation with these new technologies circulated
in international networks. Ottoman administrators, sensitive to the empire’s environmental, economic, and social particularities, participated in these networks and translated their knowledge into imperial policies and local practice. In addition to increased inputs into and greater state control over agricultural production, these policies also encouraged the recognition of an expertise derived from working with these technologies that distinguished itself as scientific and distinct from existing peasant expertise at the same time that it relied on it. Under the mandate local technocrats would persist in trying to maintain various initiatives started during Ottoman rule, but would find themselves thwarted by the nature of mandate rule and its priorities. The result was the development of a nationalist critique that expressed frustration with environmental management under the mandate and mandate officials’ disregard for the region’s rural areas in its administrative policies.
Chapter 1

WORLD EXHIBITIONS AND TRACTOR COMPETITIONS: NETWORKS, KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION, AND RURAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE LATE OTTOMAN PERIOD

In 1893, Ahmet Reşid Bey, the Ottoman agricultural inspector for the provinces of Syria and Beirut left his post and made his way via Port Said and New York to Chicago to attend the World’s Columbian Exposition. Despite the potential repercussions of leaving his post without permission, his eagerness to examine the exhibition’s displays of new agricultural equipment apparently overcame any qualms he might have had. Reşid Bey’s enthusiasm was representative of that exhibited by a growing group of Ottoman officials who, for purposes of food and resource production as well as revenue, were enthusiastic to experiment with and apply knowledge about emerging technologies in the agricultural sphere through new administrative policies and practices. These new technologies such as chemical fertilizers and mechanized equipment represented for these officials a break from existing agricultural practice—a new form of agriculture that they deemed “scientific” (fenn-i ziraat). Like Reşid Bey they were eager to learn about these new processes in order to assess whether they might be conducive to ecologies and agricultural practice in the imperial domains.

Their enthusiasm, however, was tempered by caution. As in many parts of the world in the late 19th century, agricultural production in the Ottoman Empire was a key source of revenue and provided subsistence-level sustenance for a large portion of the empire’s population. Changes to existing practice would require not only a careful analysis of new technologies’ suitability to local ecologies, but also transformations to social and economic institutions and infrastructure. In particular, officials began to experiment with new forms of credit and taxation

57 BOA, BEO 210.15701 Vekil-i Vali Defterdar Zühdü to Agriculture Ministry, 1 May 1309 [13 May 1893], Y.A.HUS 278.4, Foreign Office to Sublime Porte, 1 Temmuz 1309 [13 July 1893].
infrastructure. These experiments would lead to critiques of certain prevalent land tenure arrangements. *Musha’*, a form of commonly-held land, became a particular object of reform as Ottoman officials deemed it a hindrance to these projects. Then there was the question of how best to apply these new developments in local ecologies and whether they were even suitable—a question answered by building an entire infrastructure of new experimental and educational institutions that would translate their enthusiasm into practice.

1893 also marked the year that the Ottoman Administration formed the Ministry of Forest, Mines and Agriculture, the culmination of fifty-five years of experiments with different ways of organizing the government’s involvement in agricultural administration.\(^{58}\) Given the material and financial realities of what implementing emerging technologies and practices would entail, Ottoman technocrats, increasingly joined by local elites, especially those with larger landholdings most suitable to experimentation, insisted on the importance of state support for their endeavors. While for centuries agriculture had been the primary generator of state revenue, now officials and local elites increasingly argued the state needed to pursue far more intensive investment in agricultural production in order to ensure higher revenues for the future. The suggested changes experimented with new land tenure practices, policies for capital generation, and taxation strategies. I argue that as technocratic excitement for the productive capacities of these new techniques and what officials conceived of as the policies necessary to successfully pursue and exploit them increased, a corresponding campaign to increase appreciation for

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\(^{58}\) Donald Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture in Anatolia, 1876-1908” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), 72. A Council of Agriculture and Industry had first been formed in 1838 and then an Agriculture Council in 1843. An Agricultural Ministry was established in 1846 but was soon thereafter incorporated into the Commerce Ministry. It was under the Public Works Council in the 1850s before a separate Commerce and Agriculture Ministry was formed in the late 60s, but then at some point agricultural affairs came under the purview of the Commerce and Public Works Ministry until 1893. (Quataert, “Ottoman Reform,” 75-78). For comparison’s sake it is interesting to note that Gambetta formed an agricultural ministry in France in 1882—a move considered “a first tentative step towards an efficient administrative structure” (Annie Moulin, *Peasantry and Society in France since 1789* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 108).
agriculture emerged that sought to distinguish these new methods and practices as distinct from existing practices. This distinction-making aimed to reframe agriculture as a science just as worthy of investment and government attention as medicine or industry, its more “modern” counterparts, and would involve the formation of a network of model farms and fields and the encouragement of book-based agricultural education. In the following chapter I trace the participation of Ottoman technocrats in various global networks struggling to grapple with these new technologies and their implications. I then consider the consequences of these interactions for policies of rural administration at the local level, particularly in Bilad al-Sham, and the changing role urged upon the state. The next chapter will look at how the importance attributed to acquiring this knowledge manifested itself in the institutionalization of distinct forms of agricultural education.

In analyzing Ottoman technocrats’ participation in these global networks of technocrats and farmers struggling to comprehend and test the impacts of these new technologies, I aim to highlight how this process was one of translation and appropriation but also rejection. These global networks were committed to internationalizing not only knowledge about new forms of scientific agricultural practice, but also the methods and strategies for disseminating their use and calculating the resulting production. I demonstrate how Ottoman technocrats and farmers experimented with and evaluated European or American-made technologies alongside their own in order to assess their suitability to local conditions and ecologies. They explored ways that these practices could be applied locally but were also wary of their feasibility and impacts. I aim to show how these technocrats participating in a globalized process of knowledge production transferred their experiences within global networks into imperial administration and then local practice—a local practice shaped, in turn, by specific environments and the sometimes
idiosyncratic responses of local actors. To demonstrate some of the local repercussions, I analyze several examples from the eastern Mediterranean of the policies these translations entailed, taking into consideration their relationship to environmental specificities and local responses. While scientific agriculture continued to remain a conversation largely among elites, the administrative strategies suggested by efforts to promote agricultural “progress” would have more wide-ranging impacts and influences.

**Ottoman Technocrats and Global Networks**

In order to trace the production and circulation of this knowledge, I look at several examples of knowledge dissemination via global networks that were particularly relevant to agricultural practice in Syria. From international congresses to the soil of ploughed fields, these examples span three continents and as many decades. The first looks more closely at the results of Reşid Bey’s trip to Chicago in 1893, the second at Ottoman participation in the establishment of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome in 1905, and the third at an Ottoman agriculture teacher’s assessment of a 1913 tractor competition in Algeria. From North America to Southern Europe to North Africa, examining Ottoman participation in these events not only sheds new light on the personal engagement of Ottoman technocrats with their counterparts in Europe and beyond, it also demonstrates how their participation in the global sphere inflected practice at the local level as they confronted challenges to implementing the dictates of new scientific agricultural expertise. Although Ottoman technocrats were an integral and enthusiastic part of international networks engaged in learning about, experimenting with, and disseminating these new methods, it was conditions at the local level—ecological, social, and economic—that
posed the most intransigent challenges—a point I will examine more fully in the second half of the chapter.

By the 1890s, efforts were well underway in the Ottoman Empire to build a network of individuals trained in the latest expertise regarding new scientific agricultural discoveries. Since 1880, a number of Ottoman high school graduates had been sent to agricultural schools in Germany and France to learn the latest techniques under experimentation in these regions. Upon their return they were appointed as agricultural inspectors in various provinces.\(^59\) In 1892, the Halkalı Agricultural School (\textit{Halkali Ziraat Mebtebi}) in Istanbul accepted its first class of students who would be locally trained by some of these returned graduates.\(^60\) As inspectors, their knowledge was considered indispensable to various projects underway in the provinces. In bustling Beirut, the governor had tapped the aforementioned Ahmet Reşid Bey, the agricultural inspector for both Syria and Beirut, for a promotion in light of the fact that the province only had four engineers to carry out rapidly multiplying tasks.\(^61\) But Reşid Bey, educated in the \textit{Mekteb-i Sultani} and in France, had more ambitious plans in mind. In March 1893, he wrote for permission to accompany a group of Beirut traders bound for New York in a rented boat carrying Syrian crops. To justify his request, he insisted that the benefits for the Ottoman domains of gaining a fuller knowledge of American agriculture were imperative.\(^62\) When permission was not forthcoming, Reşid Bey left anyway and sent a telegram from Port Said to confirm his whereabouts.\(^63\) Consternation at his departure immediately turned into efforts to find and confirm a replacement. Reşid Bey meanwhile, possibly aware of his imminent dismissal,

\(^{59}\) Quataert, “Ottoman Reform,” 89-90. It is unclear if Reşid Bey was among this government sponsored group but it seems likely—he indicates that he was educated at the \textit{Mekteb-i Sultani}, one of the high schools from which the students were chosen, and in Europe (see below). Furthermore Syria was a province to which one of the returning students was appointed (Quataert, “Ottoman Reform,” 87).

\(^{60}\) Quataert, “Ottoman Reform,” 94.

\(^{61}\) BOA, BEO 159.11880, Beirut governor to Sublime Porte, 21 Kanunuevvel 1308 [2 January 1893].

\(^{62}\) BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid Bey to Huzur Sami-i Sadar Azım, 5 Mart 1309 [17 March 1893].

\(^{63}\) BOA, BEO 210.15701 Vekil-i Vali Deftedar Zühdü to Agriculture Ministry, 1 Mayis 1309 [13 May 1893].
made his way to New York, passed through Canada, and, according to diplomatic correspondence, was already looking for another job.\textsuperscript{64} The extensive trail of resulting correspondence demonstrates not only what was at stake for Reşid Bey, but also what was at stake for the Ottoman administration in his Chicago experience.

According to Reşid Bey, the importance of his journey and the reason he had made such an impulsive and potentially disastrous career decision was, he claimed, the expansiveness of the Chicago Columbian Exhibition’s agriculture exhibit. While he had studied agriculture in Paris and attended the 1889 Exposition Universelle, the Chicago Exhibition gave a far more complete sense of the array of technologies available.\textsuperscript{65} After all, the provinces of Syria and Beirut were prone to much hotter, drier summers than either Montpellier or Grignon, France (near Paris)—the two cities that were typical destinations for Ottoman agricultural students studying abroad. Developments in American agricultural technology had the potential to offer new and different insights--European machines, he claimed, could not compete with American machines in terms of their potential suitability for the Ottoman domains.\textsuperscript{66} In particular, he mentioned their cheaper costs being especially attractive.\textsuperscript{67}

In fact, the Chicago Exhibition’s Ottoman commissioner, Hakkı Pasha, considered the knowledge Reşid Bey was gaining from the experience so valuable that he even wrote on his behalf to explain that every day he was busy observing agriculture exhibits and learning American agricultural methods. He even urged that, as Reşid Bey’s funds were running out and it looked like he would not have a job upon his return, he should even be given a partial stipend to enable him to extend his stay since the knowledge he was gaining would indeed greatly

\textsuperscript{64} BOA, HR.SYS 72.58, Translation (to Ottoman) of correspondence from the Washington embassy, 27 Haziran 1893 [27 June 1893]; Y.A.HUS 278.4, Foreign Office to Sublime Porte, 1 Temmuz 1309 [13 July 1893].
\textsuperscript{65} BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid’s report, n.d..
\textsuperscript{66} BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid’s report, n.d..
\textsuperscript{67} BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid’s report, n.d..
benefit the well-protected domains upon his return. While concern was rife that such a move might be seen as pardoning his “impertinent” (münasebetsiz) behavior and encouraging repeat offences, the perceived importance of the information he was acquiring triumphed and in the end some lira were authorized to be given to him from the exhibition’s appropriations.

Scholars have analyzed Ottoman participation in the Chicago Exhibition from the angle of its architecture and what these displays can tell us about how the Empire tried to represent itself on a global stage, but the actual connections that were made and the exchanges of knowledge that occurred between attending foreign experts and their Ottoman counterparts have not received much attention. Certainly one of the main reasons, according to fair promoters, that the Sultan had taken such a personal interest in the event was due to “showing Turkish progress in science and education” about which he “gave orders concerning several exhibits.” Yet the exchange and consumption of knowledge about new technologies was also central to the fair’s purpose. It thus seems important to consider the impacts of interactions involving these aspects of the fair.

In an elaborate, thirty-seven page Ottoman language report on the exhibit that Reşid Bey later submitted and which probably was key to mollifying official opinion back in Istanbul and Beirut, he described the agricultural, horticultural, forest and minerals offices of the exhibition and then provided a detailed list of what each foreign government had contributed to the

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68 BOA, İ.HUS 17.1311-R-23, Chicago exhibition commissioner to Ministry, 29 Haziran 1309 [11 July 1893].
agricultural exhibit. He followed these up with a section on new tools and implements and some observations about American approaches to cultivating potatoes, cotton, tobacco, and forage crops. In closing he compiled statistics for each American state’s production of wheat and corn for 1859, 1879, and 1887. He also noted that because each big city in the United States had factories for producing farm machinery, he hoped “with a little bit of encouragement” that these American producers could supply the Empire with machines at “very cheap prices.” When introducing these new technologies, economizing on cost was clearly a key concern. New technologies were understood to be capital-intensive, but the less so, the better.

In addition to these details, the report recommended, based on the suitability and potential affordability of American machinery, that American manufacturers should be invited to participate in the Ottoman Agricultural and Industrial Exhibition that was currently in the process of being planned for Istanbul. Apparently, Ottoman officials were impressed enough with the information provided that, despite the exhibit being primarily about showcasing Ottoman goods, they did indeed decide to invite American manufacturers to participate in the exhibit’s agricultural section, albeit informally and as an exception. The exhibition would be cancelled due to an earthquake in Istanbul, but the importance of the knowledge and experience conveyed by Reşid Bey in his report was clearly deemed worthy of further distribution. After all, the goal of the Istanbul exhibition was to demonstrate to Ottoman farmers methods from which they might choose to “enlarge their ideas of their own work and enable them to improve it.”

72 BOA, BEO 296.23023, Reşid Bey to Sublime Porte, 10 Teşrinievvel 1309 [22 October 1893]. This is a letter indicating that he is sending the report; BEO 18.1349 actually contains the undated report.
73 BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid’s report, n.d.
74 BOA, BEO 18.1349, Reşid’s report, n.d.
76 Levant Herald, 4 September 1893, quoted in Çelik, Displaying the Orient, 142. This entire quote is as follows: “show to the native industrialists and agriculturists such foreign methods, models, and types of production as might
Although the extent of this knowledge’s benefits could only be determined after extensive experimentation throughout the empire, clearly Reşid Bey had demonstrated that American technologies had something distinct to offer. Developed in different ecologies, within alternative networks of expertise and with the potential of being available at cheaper prices, they could compete with German and French technologies and could contribute to the expertise acquired in the German and French-based institutions that had trained the current batch of Ottoman inspectors and teachers. While it is unclear whether threats from the Minister of Agriculture, Selim Melhamé Efendi (a Beirut native) to deprive Reşid Bey of 1-2 months of work upon his return ever materialized, a plan to replace him with the agricultural inspector from Edirne did not and he was eventually allowed to resume his former post.\(^77\) Having made his case for his unauthorized (mezuniyetsiz) departure, Reşid Bey thus returned to carry on his duties as the agricultural inspector of Beirut and Syria, a position in which he was presumably able to apply his newly-acquired expertise, an expertise that had trumped his insubordination and desertion of post.\(^78\)

If international exhibitions provided one way of circulating agricultural expertise, the formation of a more permanent international organization for exchanging ideas seems to have also had broad appeal. In 1905 an American named David Lubin pitched to the King of Italy the idea of establishing an international venue in which this expertise could be continually exchanged and disseminated on a regular basis. The result was the formation of an international body—the International Institute of Agriculture, which would become the precursor to the Food

\(^77\) BOA, BEO 308.23052, Letter from Forests, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 16 Teşrinievel 1309 [28 October 1893]; BEO 317.23738, Letter from Forests, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 7 Teşrinisani 1309 [19 November 1893].

\(^78\) It seems he may not have been in the post for long. By the fall of 1895, a man of the same name and identified as from among the [former (presumably)] agricultural inspectors of the imperial domains was publishing a journal in Cairo that was censured in the Empire (BOA, MF.MKT 288.38, MF.MKT 291.28, MF.MKT 301.17).
and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Composed of representatives from governments around the world, including membership from China, Japan, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt, the United States, and a number of countries from Europe and South America, one of its main goals was to collect and distribute official agricultural statistics on production each year. Its organizers saw this as an essential step to maintaining some kind of stability in global market prices. In addition to collecting and disseminating statistics, the Institute would provide information on the salaries of rural labor, new plant diseases and possible cures, study questions related to agricultural credit, insurance, and cooperatives, and present measures for protecting the common interests of farmers. In June 1905, an Ottoman delegate was of course among the contracting states of the convention of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome and in the ensuing years it served as a link to a wider community of like-minded technocrats for Ottoman scientific agriculture enthusiasts.

Ottoman participation in the Institute found expression at the imperial level in a number of forms. The Ottoman Agriculture and Commerce Journal [Osmanlı Ziraat ve Ticaret Gazetesi] published an account of one of the Institute’s latest meetings as an article and included summaries of comments that were considered useful or of interest to the journal’s readership. The article emphasized the need to increase the prestige of agriculture, suggesting that disproportionate investments had been made in industry, neglecting farmers and causing the “masters of agriculture” (ziraat erbabi) to leave their land and move to cities. The problem could be solved by increasing the esteem in which agriculture was held through more investment in

82 “Müşahaba,” Osmanlı Ziraat ve Ticaret Gazetesi, 20 Mayıs 1323 [2 June 1907].
efforts to convey to farmers the knowledge of new inventions and science.\textsuperscript{83} Agriculture and its practitioners’ importance as major contributors to the Ottoman economy needed to be recognized as on par with that of industry.

Government officials also became increasingly concerned with statistics collection and dissemination, as evidenced by Reşid Bey’s report and the aims of the IIA, as a means of circulating and controlling the global distribution of agricultural information.\textsuperscript{84} In an effort to contribute to this form of knowledge production and consumption, the Ottoman Interior Ministry in the summer of 1906, a year after the Institute’s founding, sent out a request to the provinces asking for each local provincial government to send with haste the kinds of information requested by the Institute.\textsuperscript{85} After the coming to power of the second constitutional government in 1908, these efforts became even more organized. In 1911/12 the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry’s statistics branch published agricultural statistics for Ottoman Asia and Africa for 1909/10 and in 1917 the Commerce and Agriculture Ministry published a set of “Industrial Statistics for 1913 and 1915.”\textsuperscript{86} For 1913/14, the ministry even printed a map of the empire’s provincial divisions surrounded by a variety of bar charts to visually represent in a succinct, colorful display key statistics on production for each province.\textsuperscript{87} Codifying and quantifying agricultural production were a means on the one hand of demonstrating and asserting

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{85} BOA, DH.MKT 1098.37, Copy of a telegraph from the Interior Ministry, 24 Haziran 1322 [7 July 1906].
\item \textsuperscript{87} See map from Atatürk Kitaplığı Collection entitled “Ticaret ve Ziraat Nezareti Devlet Osmaniyenin 1329 senesi ehval ziraiye sene mahsus istatistikleri.”
\end{itemize}
its scientific nature and encouraging further government support. But the process was also one by which the government could exercise more centralized control over knowledge of the empire’s agricultural production—an expression of the increasing “governmentalization” of the state.\(^{89}\)

The second constitutional period also saw efforts to increase agriculture’s prestige intensify. While discursively the projects proposed proclaimed the universal benefits of a depoliticized “science,” the formation during the second constitutional period of the Ottoman Agriculture Society in an effort to lower farmer attrition rates and increase agriculture’s prestige was clearly sponsored by an elite group of Ottoman technocrats. A number of influential members of the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP)—an organization dedicated to imperial reform, which brought together groups critical of the Sultan and rose to power in the 1908 revolution—had studied agriculture prior to 1908 and saw the second constitutional period as an opportunity to finally put their training into practice.\(^{90}\) Hüseyin Kazım Kadri Bey and Ahmet Riza Bey were two exemplary figures in this regard. Hüseyin Kazım, one of the editors of Tanin, the Istanbul-based CUP daily paper, had studied agriculture in France and previously worked on a model farm in Manisa.\(^{91}\) Ahmet Riza Bey, the president of the Chamber of Deputies in the post-1908 government, had pursued an interest in agriculture reportedly because he was dismayed by the state of affairs he had observed in some villages. Thinking a career in

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\(^{88}\) See Fenn-i Felahat (1296 [1878?/1880?]) in Istanbul University’s Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesesi for an earlier attempt at codification and note the reference to felahat at this point whereas later, agriculture is almost exclusively referred to as ziraat.

\(^{89}\) On governmentality see Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in The Essential Foucault, eds., Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York: The New Press, 1994), 229-245, quote from p. 244.

\(^{90}\) See M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 145.

\(^{91}\) Türk Ansiklopedisi, (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1943), 420; Hüseyin Kazım Kadri, Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Hâtilarlarım (Istanbul: Dergah Yayımları, 2000), 68-69; Hasan Kayah, Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 54. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter.
agriculture would enable him to do something about these conditions, he studied at the Grignon agricultural school in France and, after receiving his degree, returned to the Ottoman Empire. Apparently disillusioned by the inability of peasants to access the capital and security necessary to pursue the “scientific” agriculture practiced on the Empire’s model farms, he temporarily turned his attention to education. However, with the onset of the second constitutional period, or Meşrutiyet, he was elected by a number of other agricultural enthusiasts who recognized his agricultural expertise as the honorary head of the newly-formed Ottoman Agricultural Society. Hüseyin Kazım was selected as one of the society’s vice chairmen. The organization first met on 22 August 1908 in the Veterinary School in Istanbul. Their proclaimed goals were contributing to agricultural improvement through publications, helping to obtain government assistance, holding competitions, writing agricultural books, and informing agriculturalists of the agricultural needs of each area.

Ahmet Riza Bey seized upon the opportunity to take up again his interest in agriculture and work towards not only ostensibly improving conditions in rural communities but also to increasing the esteem in which these communities were held by urban ones. Entering into collaboration with the agricultural journalist, Yusuf Sadiq Bey, they proposed to tour the Anatolian countryside accompanied by a mobile printing press to demonstrate new techniques and print and distribute booklets to “enlighten” rural communities. In particular, by taking the mobile printing press they would be able to print their observations after investigating local agricultural information and conditions, tailoring by region the materials they left behind for farmers’ contemplation. They further envisioned this project of enlightenment as a two-way street. In addition to conveying their observations to farmers they planned to bring back crops.

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92 Şerif Mardin, Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 166.
94 BOA, DH.MUI 94-2.15, Ottoman Agricultural Society to the Interior Ministry, 28 Nisan 1326 [11 May 1910].
products and even local clothing to increase appreciation in the capital for agriculturally important regions.\textsuperscript{95} The language was that of enlightenment and prestige, but the underlying concern was economic: they stressed agriculture as the ultimate source of wealth. The journal \textit{Cultivator (Ekinci)} proclaimed “Before everything, agriculture is necessary” (\textit{“Her şeyden evvel ziraat lazımdır”}). A strong agricultural sector drove the birth and growth of industry and factories, which could not thrive so long as agriculture was “underdeveloped” (\textit{geri kalmış}).\textsuperscript{96}

As urban elites sought to increase agriculture’s prestige in the city, they often found \textit{scientific} agriculture a tough sell to farmers in the countryside. There was not only skepticism about just how successful it would be, but due to the large inputs of capital it tended to require and the fact that knowledge about it was primarily circulated in printed form, it remained inaccessible and largely incomprehensible to the majority of the farming population. One exasperated reader of the agricultural journal \textit{Cultivator (Ekinci)} wrote in to complain as follows:

\begin{quote}
Let me be straight with you—until now I have not seen any benefit in the agriculture books that have passed through my hands. Because those who know how to read and write a little like us farmers even with the words written would not be able to understand. Now then those who do not know how to read and write, our village brothers, even if you read it to the village imam from those words no one would understand. If these books are written for farmers like us please write so we can understand. If you are writing for yourselves that’s something else.

Moreover in these books are written quite difficult things to be done in our villages, in our fields. Since the first issue of your \textit{Ekinci}, I am taking [it]. From “Farmer Conversation” [a regular feature of the magazine] I saw a lot of benefit [b]ecause you are writing things that are easy to undertake, beneficial, and simple. However because these words are piece by piece in the journal they are forgotten, they go away.\textsuperscript{97}
\end{quote}

He concluded by urging the editors to write an equally simple book.

The editors replied that they had thought long and hard while reading the letter and had decided to put together a book to respond to these concerns. The journal then appealed to its

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95 BOA, DH.MUI 94-2.15, Ottoman Agricultural Society to the Interior Ministry, 28 Nisan 1326 [11 May 1910].
96 “Seyden evvel ziraat lazımdır,” \textit{Ekinci} 1:6 (20 Haziran 1329 [3 July 1913]): 41.
readers requesting that provincial agricultural inspectors and teachers send in their knowledge about agricultural conditions, crop types and species, and observations about agricultural improvements. They also asked local farmers to provide details about the agricultural methods of particular villages and towns, such as what kinds of products were grown and what transport options were available. The journal’s editors noted that they had traveled around the provinces some time before, but needed updated information as their previous information was “quite lacking.” As the government collected its statistics, these center-based technocrats, clearly aware of agriculture’s dynamic nature, sought to establish their own centralized means of collecting and distributing information. Already efforts were in the works to make more general scientific agricultural information accessible. In 1913, the Society for National Defense (Müdafaa-i Millîye Cemiyeti) paid for the printing of hundreds of copies of two books authored by Hüseyin Kazım entitled Farmer Child (Çiftçi Çocuğu) and Farmer Advice (Çiftçi Öğüdü). The booklets were to be distributed to provinces that requested them. Concise, with a relatively simple vocabulary, and ample illustrations, the free copies were quickly depleted.

Increasing agriculture’s prestige, studying local ecologies, and making information about new machines and methods more accessible would be of little use if they did not suit ecological conditions in the Ottoman Empire. If new techniques were not compatible with environmental conditions and management strategies, official fervor would be no match for farmer skepticism. New techniques, approaches, and machines were not always successful. An early attempt to experiment with a combine harvester had worked well for some landowners in the Biqa‘, but

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99 BOA, DH.ID 79.34, Society for National Defense to the Interior Ministry, 13 Temmuz 1329 [26 July 1913].
posed obstacles in other parts of Syria.\textsuperscript{100} They were unusable in key grain-growing regions like the Hawran because of the mountainous terrain.\textsuperscript{101} Furthermore in areas where irrigation was necessary for cereal cultivation, the prevalent dikes made with boards for irrigation purposes prevented the machines from working. They also frightened horses unused to their noise, not to mention that spare parts were hard to come by.\textsuperscript{102}

Scientific agriculture enthusiasts were thus intent on evaluating whether practices and technologies developed in other ecologies and areas with different practices of environmental management would be suitable for Ottoman environments. In particular, machines and practices developed in regions with more consistent and evenly paced rainfall such as the majority of France would only potentially be feasible in limited regions of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman technocrats seem to have been particularly interested in attending demonstrations related to scientific agriculture for hot climates (\textit{akalim-i hare}) outside of continental Europe. Three students were sent from West Tripoli (\textit{Trablus Gharb}) to Tunis to learn about \textit{bilad-i hare ziraati} (hot land agriculture) in North Africa in 1911, and, in October 1913, Ottoman officials were invited to attend a congress dedicated to hot climate agriculture in the United States.\textsuperscript{103} In 1913 an agriculture teacher from the Eskişehir teacher’s college and member of the Farmer Association, Osman Ferid, visited North Africa, a particularly suitable region for studying the effects of these technologies, to attend a tractor competition in Algeria. Writing in the May 1919 edition of the Farmers Association Journal (\textit{Çiftçiler Derneği Mecmuası}), Ferid noted the lack of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{100} Vital Cuinet, \textit{Syrie, Liban et Palestine, géographie administrative, statistique, descriptive et raisonnée} (Paris: E. Leroux, 1896), 339-340. They were also touted as more economical than hiring harvest workers, saving according to Cuinet’s estimate 20 francs 70 per hectare.
\textsuperscript{101} Cuinet, \textit{Syrie}, 340.
\textsuperscript{102} Cuinet, \textit{Syrie}, 340. In order to respond to this need the establishment and operation of \textit{demirhaneler} (форges) were often a preoccupation of government officials concerned with agricultural experimentation. See for example BOA, DH.ID 99.32, Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry to the Interior Ministry, 28 Eylül 1326 [11 October 1910] and ŞD 2246.2, Aleppo Governor to the Interior Ministry, 16 Şubat 1325 [1 March 1910].
\textsuperscript{103} BOA, DH. ID 26-1.81, Undersecretary in the name of the Foreign Ministry to the Interior Ministry, 22 Haziran 1327 [5 August 1911]; \textit{Ekinci}, 27 Temmuz 1329 [9 August 1913].
\end{footnotesize}
access to knowledge about new agricultural developments in England, France, and the United States for four years since the outbreak of war.\textsuperscript{104} To make up for this lacking information, he proceeded to pen an article describing his tractor competition experience. With meticulous detail he enumerated the characteristics of each tractor—how long each one ran per day, how deep it plowed, how much fuel it used and how much ground it covered, but he was most concerned with how each tractor broke up the soil. He noted in particular if they had tendencies to pack the earth or if they did not break the dirt into fine enough clumps.\textsuperscript{105} His concern, he explained, was related to the effectiveness of such machines given the long, hot dry summers that characterized a good portion of the ecologies of the Ottoman Empire. In particular he observed that, after sprouting, if the soil was not broken into fine-enough pieces, the roots would not be able to go far enough into the earth’s depths in summertime when long droughts were typical and deep roots essential for plant survival.\textsuperscript{106} Although the motorized plows were impressive, the tendency of some to compress the soil or not break it down into small pieces was a major shortcoming, especially for a region like Syria with its long hot, dry summers. Such an observation clearly demonstrates the concerns involved when bringing global technologies to local ecologies—any adoption of scientific agricultural practice was dependent on ensuring its suitability to local environmental exigencies.

Ottoman elites were clearly integrated into global networks of expertise intent on acquiring, diversifying, and disseminating scientific agriculture as well as adapting this knowledge to local environments and ecologies. Given that the Ottoman Empire had a broader spectrum of ecologies within its domains than those that had produced the knowledge conveyed in French and German agricultural schools, various officials clearly saw the need to expand

\textsuperscript{104} Osman Ferid, “Ateşli Pulluklar,” \textit{Çiftçiler Derneği Mecmuası}, 1 May 1335 [1 May 1919], 433.
\textsuperscript{105} Osman Ferid, “Ateşli Pulluklar,” \textit{Çiftçiler Derneği Mecmuası}, 1 May 1335 [1 May 1919], 433-434.
\textsuperscript{106} Osman Ferid, “Ateşli Pulluklar,” \textit{Çiftçiler Derneği Mecmuası}, 1 May 1335 [1 May 1919], 435.
beyond these initial forays and assess additional sources of raw data to be refined in and possibly adapted to the imperial domains. Still their project remained essentially an elite one requiring capital, a certain level of security, and basic literacy. It was also one that was increasingly in step with the Ottoman state’s priority of collecting and centralizing knowledge about agricultural production. Despite a rhetoric that emphasized farmer enlightenment and the prestige of agricultural practice through a focus on scientific knowledge, social, economic, and ecological factors remained the primary impetus for peasant and small farmer reluctance or resistance. They also represented impediments to the state’s project of increased revenue collection. In the remaining part of the chapter, I will examine the development of several technologies of rule pursued by the Ottoman administration to address these challenges, their relation to a changing vision for state-agriculture relations that also emerged during this period, and assess how these policies fared in the eastern Mediterranean, especially given the region’s environmental specificities to which I will now turn.

**The Region of Bilad al-Sham: Geography, Ecology, and Production**

The region of Bilad al-Sham is ecologically diverse and agriculturally rich and varied. During the latter decades of the Ottoman Empire, the area encompassed roughly the provinces of Syria, Beirut, and Aleppo and the mutasarrifliklar of Mt. Lebanon, Zor, and Jerusalem. Described with broad strokes, its narrow fertile coastal plain rises to terraced hillsides often planted with fruit trees divided in the south by the fertile Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea and rising in the north to the peaks of the Mt. Lebanon and, after the Biqa‘ Valley, the Anti-Lebanon range. These hills and mountains then extend into the plains of the interior which eventually become eastern grasslands giving way to semiarid desert crisscrossed by the cultivated banks of
the Euphrates River and its tributary the Khabur. In 1922, Mustafa al-Shihabi, a local agronomist who had studied in France in the late Ottoman period, set himself the task of dividing up the region into agricultural areas based on temperature, elevation, and types of plants—a classification he claimed that at least as far as he was aware had not been attempted elsewhere. Writing in the wake of the Ottoman withdrawal at the end of World War I and before the full repercussions of the post-war division of the region between British and French mandate rule had become clear, he presented the perspective of a government administrator intent on maximizing the agricultural potential of the region. In doing so, he provided a useful overview of the region’s current agricultural situation and also suggested how its ecologies could be used to expand and further diversify cultivation in the future. In attempting to divide the area ecologically, he settled on identifying five distinct regions: the Jordan Valley, the coasts, the plains, the mountains, and the desert.

In a description that highlighted far more than just the region’s rich grain-growing capacity, he outlined its potential for virtual self-sufficiency in a number of crops with geographically close areas suitable for planting and ripening at different times. He defined the region’s ecological divisions and their distinguishing features for agricultural purposes in the following manner. The Jordan Valley was always relatively warm or hot and could be a source of vegetables even in winter. While it did not receive much rain—on average no more than 250-350 mm—improved use of the Jordan River’s waters and that of its tributaries could make dependence on rainfall unnecessary. While its current production revolved around crops such

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107 I will discuss his background and unfolding role in the agriculture of the region more in the chapters to follow.
110 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 42-43.
as rushes, various forms of cane, and papyrus among other things, he suggested it would be a suitable environment for cotton as well as sugarcane and sugar beet. The coasts meanwhile were cooler with more abundant rains, while clouds from the sea protected crops from frost, making the region particularly suitable for citrus crops as well as bananas and pomegranates. Vegetables would also ripen earlier than in colder regions. The vast plains of the interior meanwhile were excellent for the region’s famous grain crops—in particular, the Hawran with its fertile hills and plains was renowned for the quality and abundance of its grain harvest.

The climate and some geographical features of the region, however, could inject an element of unpredictability into the equation. On the one hand, winds from the west brought moisture in summer and essential rain in winter. On the other, hot dry east winds in late spring could scorch crops. Furthermore, rivers were few given the expanse of the plains and this necessitated the application of dry farming techniques in many regions. Al-Shihabi insisted that a wide variety of other plants could be grown in these rainfed areas as long as the soil was worked well in the spring to prevent it from losing moisture from its depths. However, to further diversify and reduce the unpredictability of harvests, irrigation was essential. In particular, fruit trees and vegetables did well in irrigated areas such as the Ghouta oasis around Damascus, Ba’albek and Homs. The mountains meanwhile were given to “olive, vine, fig, almond, pine nut, cypress, wild pistachio, sugarberry, and grains” cultivation with a myriad of fruit trees also cropped in irrigated lands. Finally, the desert regions, while not suitable for cultivation, produced grasses in winter and early spring that were crucial for the grazing of pastoralists’

111 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 43.
112 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 44, 45.
113 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 45.
114 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 47; Cuinet, Syria, 345-7.
115 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 47.
116 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 47-48
117 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 47.
118 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 48.
animals. His description revealed in the diversity of crops that could be grown in each region and the climatic and geographical conditions that enabled crops in certain areas, such as the Jordan Valley and the coasts, to ripen earlier or at different times of year, thus ensuring local supplies for longer periods of time, especially if transportation networks were improved.

The variety of ecological and agricultural regions in Bilad al-Sham and the government planning involved in exploiting them presents an interesting contrast with its neighbor, Egypt, where the Nile serves as the primary source of irrigation. Its waters, though prone to annual variation in level especially before the building of a series of dams during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the 1902 Aswan Dam, tended to be more consistent than the disparities in rainfall that could decimate crops in Bilad al-Sham, especially in the rainfed, grain-producing plains. During the late nineteenth-century Egypt’s Nile-centered agricultural geography and the needs of British textile manufacturers encouraged the supplanting of large areas of subsistence crops with cotton cultivation. Syrian agriculture, in contrast, remained more subsistence-oriented with wheat and barley the predominant staples. This was further supplemented by vineyards, olives, and a variety of fruit crops. Crops primarily aimed at exports, such as the mulberry trees essential for raising silkworms, flourished in ecologies such as the hillsides of Mt. Lebanon that were unsuitable to large-scale grain cultivation. While foreign competition or a

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119 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 49. Although he notes that between Palmyra, Sukhna, and Selemiye there may be areas that would respond to dry farming techniques in years with enough rain, although how one would know in advance which years would be appropriate he does not address.
120 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a, 41-49. His attempt to conceive of Bilad al-Sham in this manner in the immediate post-World War I period demonstrates the still uncertain fate of the mandates and the implications of the borders they will impose. Al-Shihabi clearly considers it an integrated space whose diverse ecologies he views through the eyes of a state technocrat, noting how these different ripening and harvest times in some areas will be best taken advantage of through constructing better transportation networks.
fall in global prices could be devastating for these areas, the fortunes of one crop did not essentially determine the region’s economic well-being. Furthermore not only was Egypt’s economic welfare particularly susceptible to fluctuations in market prices, but the intensity of cotton cultivation also encouraged the diffusion of ecological challenges such as the cotton worm pest. While Syria had its share of pests, most infamously perhaps the locusts that would periodically wreak havoc, but also field mice, and in the aftermath of World War I, the increasingly prevalent and detested souné, a small insect that attacks wheat and barley, its biodiversity meant it was less prone to the economic and ecological devastations of one particular blight.

As Ottoman technocrats circulated between global, imperial, and local networks they thus sought a variety of techniques whose application might increase output and enable more profitable management of these diverse ecologies. However, while insisting the challenges posed by ecology and environmental factors were ultimately surmountable through application of the inventions and know-how of industry and science, they also identified a number of infrastructural challenges to realizing their implementation. These concerns revolved around the question of how to provide the capital and ensure the infrastructural space and support that would facilitate “scientific” agricultural practice and guarantee the government benefitted from the anticipated increase in revenues. Wealthy farmers meanwhile articulated their own particular vision of the state’s role in supporting agricultural change, although their suggestions paralleled in many ways Ottoman technocrats’ proposals. The next section examines the changing nature of several aspects of provincial agrarian administration, considering imperial experiments with

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125 See chapter 5 for further discussion about some of these pests.
these institutions in an effort to encourage agricultural production as well as local responses to them and the suggestions for future policies and directions they proposed.

**Imperial Projects and Local Perspectives: A New Role for the State?**

The latter half of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth witnessed a general flourishing in agricultural production throughout the Ottoman Empire. In eastern areas of provinces of Aleppo and Syria new land came under cultivation as extensive, but not necessarily more intensive, agriculture increased. Nonetheless, a drop in the prices of agricultural products between 1873-1896 may have encouraged the eruption of various expressions of discontent in rural areas while the establishment of the Ottoman Public Debt Administration in 1881 created tension between the central government and local elites who had been responsible for collecting taxes on items that now came under the Public Debt Administration’s authority, such as the silk tithes, fish, stamp, and spirit taxes, and the monopolies on salt and tobacco. Still highly reliant on revenue from agricultural sources to meet the empire’s annual budget, Ottoman administrators scrutinized ways to make rural administration, namely tax collection, more lucrative and efficient while also experimenting with means of infusing greater amounts of capital into agricultural production in an effort to increase production as well as facilitate the introduction of new methods and technologies.

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126 Donald Quataert, “Part IV The Age of Reforms, 1812-1914” in An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire, 1300-1914, eds. Halil İnalcık and Donald Quataert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 843-848.
But the state, its bureaucrats, and government-funded technocrats like Reşid Bey weren’t the only ones interested in increasing productivity and pursuing new methods. A number of local agriculturally-invested elites in Bilad al-Sham were also keen to participate in these international networks of knowledge production, articulating their own perspectives on how the state could contribute to and improve agricultural output so that it could compete more effectively in global markets. As one of them, Wady Médawar, complained, “progress” globally in agricultural methods elsewhere would lead to increased production, while Syrian peasants would miss out as they found themselves producing less in comparison while prices also dropped. Thus he and several of his colleagues put forth their own proposals for what the state could do to intervene on cultivators’ behalf. The divergence in their projects and the state’s projects is telling—while the government tended to emphasize greater centralized control and institution-building that benefitted middling farmers, Syrian elites stressed the need for greater intervention at the local level and reforms that ostensibly at least would be more attractive to risk-adverse farmers, albeit with one major caveat—education for landowning elites.

Wady Médawar was one of at least three Syrian students who attended L’Institut Agricole de Beauvais, an agricultural school located just northwest of Paris, within the first five years of the 20th century. The school had been established in 1855 by the “Frères de la Doctrine Chrétienne” through the additional of an agricultural section to their existing boarding school with the intent of providing “scientific and technical” training to students “on top of classical studies to those who work in the countryside so that agriculture would be

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130 Of course, I suppose one could also see their proposals as being about making the terms for themselves more attractive.
131 A number of other students from the region also attended agricultural schools in France during the years before World War I and I will discuss some of them in more detail in the next chapter. However, I single out these three here because they wrote theses that enable some insight into the kinds of proposals being urged by local elites.
prosperous.”132 That is, students were expected to continue pursuing practical agriculture work after graduation, which at least in the case of these three Syrian students entailed a thesis defended before the Société des Agriculteurs de France who presided over the school’s exams from 1883 to 1939. Their attendance at the school coincided with a period of the school’s history during which it apparently welcomed a number of foreign students. This lasted until 1905 at which point the school was forced to secularize and almost closed.133 Operating much like one of the state’s practical agricultural schools, but charging about four times more in fees for room, board and instruction, one report characterized it as “a private agricultural school of a high class, receiving, however, a subvention from the State.”134 Certainly the three students who attended it from Syria seem to have come from wealthy families. One, Edouard Saadé, was the son of Jibra’il Saadé, identified as among the “avant-garde of the economic men” in Latakia.135 Each one, in elaborating his vision for agricultural reform in the region, prefaces the details with a clear insistence on the role the state must play in bringing about the change in agriculture they seek. This process was not one that could be achieved only through a dependence on the resources of largely subsistence level peasants or even small and large farmers, rather it was incumbent on the state to support and to some extent at least invest in agriculture as this would ensure future increases in revenue from which the state would benefit.

134 H. M. Jenkins, Report on Agricultural Education in North Germany, France, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and the United Kingdom (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1884), 117-118.
135 See Yusuf al-Hakim, Suriya wa al-‘Ahd al-‘Uthmani (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1980), 95. I have not been able to trace the backgrounds of Wady Médawar and Toufik Saadé.
The majority of taxation revenues in the Ottoman Empire on the eve of World War I still came from agricultural production.\textsuperscript{136} Quataert suggests that agriculture was the source of approximately 56 percent of “national’ income” in 1914.\textsuperscript{137} In Bilad al-Sham, despite the diversity of crops cultivated, cereal crops remained the main source of tithe revenues. In 1907 this constituted, for example, 88 percent in the province of Aleppo and 77 percent in the province of Syria.\textsuperscript{138} However, while production expanded over the course of the nineteenth century, the state struggled to harness this increase through taxation. Concerned about balancing the budget with incoming tax receipts and losing tax revenue through what officials perceived as inefficiencies in the wide-spread practice of tax farming, they began to experiment with other administrative processes aimed at greater centralization and a more consistent budget.\textsuperscript{139} Under the initial centralizing efforts of the Tanzimat, the government had instituted a process of tax collection through government agents, known as \textit{muhassilar}, in 1840. Paid by Istanbul with salaries set by provincial councils, the members of which were selected by the \textit{muhassilar}, these agents were prone to their own inefficiencies, sometimes fleecing the government in cahoots with local council members or otherwise lacking sufficient local knowledge and provoking the

\textsuperscript{136} This contrasts with France where the tithe had been abolished, but instead of another comparable amount of tax being levied on peasants through other means, the burden of taxation shifted to urban areas where customs dues from 1804 constituted a key source of indirect taxation (Moulin, \textit{Peasantry}, 44). By the eve of World War I, taxes on the peasantry were still relatively light as the government tried to encourage “small family farms” (Moulin, \textit{Peasantry}, 142). Shaw suggests that increasing tax income from urban taxpayers and reducing it from rural ones was a goal of the Tanzimat reformers, but that it was largely unsuccessful (Stanford J. Shaw, “The Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Tax Reforms and Revenue System,” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} 6:4 (October 1975): 421).

\textsuperscript{137} Quataert, “Age of Reforms,” 845.

\textsuperscript{138} Quataert, “Age of Reforms,” 845.

resistance of influential groups.\footnote{Huri İslamoğlu, “Politics of Administering Property: Law and Statistics in the Nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire,” in Huri İslamoğlu, ed., Constituting Property: Private Property in the East and West (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 303-304; Shaw, “Reforms,” 422. Shaw notes that as a result of the new system, tax revenues dropped noticeably in 1840 (422). It is not clear the extent to which this policy was implemented throughout the empire.} Their resulting ineffectiveness led the government to eliminate the post in 1842.\footnote{İslamoğlu, “Politics,” 304.}

Under Abdulhamid, whose preferred taxation method was a land tax, a committee carried out a thorough study of the empire’s agricultural taxation options in 1879 and found that, although in most areas taxation was still done by tax farming, it should in theory be administered according to three methods. Namely, government agents should collect in kind in settled areas, tax farmers should be used for predominantly pastoralist areas such as large portions of the province of Aleppo, and a cash land tax should be instituted where the requisite information about land conditions was available.\footnote{Akarlı, “The Problems,” 157-8, 162.} The tithe was considered intrinsically “fair and equitable,” its collection process just needed to be streamlined.\footnote{Akarlı, “The Problems,” 159-160.} An administrative apparatus to follow up on the committee’s recommendations was established in 1880, but it only lasted until 1886 as it encountered numerous problems and did not seem to particularly increase efficiency, leading the government to eventually revert back to tax farming for most areas.\footnote{Akarlı, “The Problems,” 162-4.} When tax farmers were unwilling to bid, the government would tax villages based on a five year average of the villages’ tithes.\footnote{See Engin Deniz Akarlı, “Economic Policy and Budgets in Ottoman Turkey, 1876-1909,” Middle Eastern Studies 28, no. 3 (July 1992): 446-447 and Akarlı, “The Problems,” 163-4, 165. In the article, Akarlı suggests that this five-year system had been the basis of taxation under the new administrative process. Taxation by tax farming seems to have largely prevailed in the following years and was the basis on which the Public Debt Administration established tithe-derived kilometic guarantees of profit for a series of railway lines throughout the empire, including the Hama-Damascus line in Bilad al-Sham. In 1905, the government again tried to institute collection by agents in cash using a five-year average but found the measure met with “strenuous objections” from PDA officials (Blaisdell, European Financial Control, 127-8, 143-4).} Officials also attempted to institute a land tax in limited regions where records existed regarding land values, but the variety of factors that had to be taken into
consideration to make this feasible were many and implementing it on a wider scale remained impracticable.\textsuperscript{146} Even in the limited areas where it was tried it proved a challenge to maintain.\textsuperscript{147}

The rate at which the tithe was assessed also proved contentious. Technically it was supposed to be 10\%, although this could vary.\textsuperscript{148} Several documents dealing with the assessment of the tithe in areas more prone to drought such as Karak, Hawran, and Hama in Syria suggest there were efforts to take this into consideration.\textsuperscript{149} In March 1887 the amount was raised officially to 11.5\% with 1\% of the additional tax going to a public works fund, the \textit{menafi iane hissesi}, which was a key component of the agricultural bank’s capital, and the remaining 0.5\% constituting a sum to be used for establishing local educational institutions, the \textit{maarif hisse-i ianesi}.\textsuperscript{150} Although an increased burden on peasants, the government justified these funds as investments in projects that would help increase production or provide local services like village schools.

In assessing the state of local taxation in 1903, Médawar like Abdulhamid’s officials clearly considered a tax taken “en nature” and therefore variable according to harvest yields without additional “formalities” well-suited to the economic needs of the region. A fixed tax would need to wait until more consistent year-to-year harvests were assured.\textsuperscript{151} However, he was critical of the way in which the tax was physically taken “en nature.”\textsuperscript{152} While the government

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Akarlı, “The Problems,” 165.
\item Akarlı, “The Problems,” 156.
\item BOA, DH.MKT 1665.45; DH.MKT 1142.20.
\item Selçuk Akşın Somel, \textit{The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline} (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 146; Donald Quataert, “Dilemma of Development: The Agricultural Bank and Agricultural Reform in Ottoman Turkey, 1888-1908,” \textit{International Journal of Middle East Studies} vol. 6, no. 2 (April 1975), 213. T. Saadé indicates that in Latakia by 1905 the amount taken for the agricultural bank is 1.75\% (T. Saadé, \textit{Essai}, 39). An additional 0.5\% surtax was added in 1897 and 0.63\% in 1900 for military supplies (George Young, \textit{Corps de droit ottoman; recueil des codes, lois, règlements, ordonnances et actes les plus importants du droit intérieur, et d'études sur le droit coutumier de l'Empire ottoman}, vol. 5 (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1906), 303).
\item Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 24, 31.
\item Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 24.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
was concerned with ensuring that more of the tithe found its way into their coffers, Médawar was concerned about the adverse effects on the peasantry of the wait that could be involved in the collection process. Collecting the tithe, especially when government agents were involved, seems to have involved an element of delay and financial loss largely due to lack of facilities or because the collectors were waiting for better prices than those prevailing immediately following the harvest. According to one report, during this time grain crops in particular could be left on the threshing floor where peasants and their animals could live off of them, but could not thresh or remove them for sale. Médawar’s proposed solution involved establishing an agreement between village shaykhs or using large landowners to collect the tithe themselves, which he claimed would ensure “a complete liberty of movements.” Clearly such a proposal was also about maintaining greater local control over the process and reinforcing local power structures. Yet appealing to the government’s concern for its treasury, he insisted that such procedures would more directly link agricultural prosperity with state resources. He claimed the treasury’s ever more pressing demands to meet its budgets impelled civil servant tax collectors to try to deliver more than their predecessors with little regard for local impacts. Since despite these efforts the state’s treasure still struggled, he suggested the government focus less on extraction and more on production.

To this end the government had already decreed the establishment of an agricultural bank in 1888, which was supposed to facilitate farmers’ access to affordable loans. Quataert has

154 Issawi, Fertile Crescent, 76.
155 Médawar, La Syrie, 24.
156 Médawar, La Syrie, 24.
157 Médawar, La Syrie, 24-25.
158 Médawar, La Syrie, 26.
159 This was a similar timeline to that of the development of agricultural credit structures in France. A 28 July 1860 law had allowed for the formation of a “Crédit Agricole” society, but this got into “very hazardous operations in
suggested that these banks, which ostensibly loaned money at lower interest rates than existing options, could have been the source of tension with local moneylenders or powerholders. As a result, local notables potentially maneuvered to obtain positions in the bank’s administration to safeguard their interests. Certainly, the direction of local branches appears to have been derived from the provincial elite and government-appointed officials. They were to be headed by a director, the inspector of agriculture in the province, and two delegates chosen by the chambers of agriculture and commerce as well as the local municipality. The bank’s capital was local in contrast to the resources of the primarily foreign-capitalized Ottoman Bank. In addition to the 1% raised as capital for the bank from the tithe, its resources would consist of the amounts that had been collected for the public utility accounts and their debts as well as any interest accruing once the bank was operational. The bank was supposed to stop accruing capital from the tithe once it achieved a capital of 10 million Ottoman pounds and would pay an interest rate of 4%. It also experimented with repayment options that were more responsive to the financial and ecological challenges farmers faced. Loans were made for either a one to ten year period or a three month to one year period. The law set the interest at 6% and forbid loaning to anyone but

Egypt” in 1876 leading to bankruptcy (A. Souchon, Agricultural Credit in France (Exposition Universelle de San Francisco, 1915), 2). A fresh attempt at establishing short term, affordable credit was undertaken by the law of 5 (6?) November 1894, which allowed for the formation of local credit caisses (Souchon, Agricultural, 12; Moulin, Peasantry, xvi). The Ottoman Agricultural Bank was also the heir to earlier credit structures in the Ottoman Empire such as Midhat Pasha’s Memleket Sandığı, initially established in Tuna Province, then replicated in other parts of the empire, although it “suffered from certain administrative and financial difficulties,” and the Menafi Sandığı started in 1883 (Quataert, “Dilemma,” 212).

162 André Autheman, The Imperial Ottoman Bank (Karaköy, Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Centre, 2002).
164 “Ziraat Bankası Nizamnamesi,” Düstur, Vol. 6, 136, 137. Funds had to be deposited for a fixed amount of time and no less than three months (137).
165 “Ziraat Bankası Nizamnamesi,” Düstur, Vol. 6, 140.
Furthermore if debtors could prove catastrophic circumstances then they could delay repayment. In fact, several years after the initial promulgation of the law, “benefitting from acquired experience,” the period of delay was increased to as many as 10 years since some who had “borrowed for a much shorter term had experienced damages or were very poor.” In the early 1890s, the Istanbul Chamber of Commerce also suggested the bank accept alternative forms of collateral such as tools or crops since this would not only encourage small farmers, but provide opportunities for sharecroppers.

In addition to making loans the annual profits of the bank were to be redistributed in a way to encourage agricultural production—1/3 would go to the bank’s capital, 1/3 to the agricultural institutions in each province with a bank branch and 1/3 to the Minister of Commerce for use in combating epizootics, improving cattle breeding, and acquiring better seeds. For Bilad al-Sham in 1898 this meant an allotment of 15,635 piasters for the Damascus model field and 23,870 piasters for the one in Aleppo. However, despite the bank’s initial purpose clearly being to provide capital for agricultural investment, its administrative apparatus actually came to serve as a transfer point for a number of different government funds. These included ones related to education and the military, as well as others involving agriculture but in various guises such as forestry revenues, a lottery to facilitate refugee resettlement with agricultural implements, and salaries for road construction. In addition it was a source of funds in

166 “Ziraat Bankası Nizamnamesi,” Düstur, Vol. 6, 140.
167 “Ziraat Bankası Nizamnamesi,” Düstur, Vol. 6, 141.
168 Young, Corps, 348.
170 “Ziraat Bankası Nizamnamesi,” Düstur, Vol. 6, 142. Quataert indicates, however, that the distinction between a third allocated locally and a third going to the center quickly disappeared and that with the exclusion of one year after 1892, two-thirds went to the center (Quataert, “Dilemma,” 220).
171 Young, Corps, 349.
moments of state emergencies—from 1892-1908, the government took out loans for various reasons amounting to five times more than the bank invested in agriculture.\textsuperscript{172}

As the government took what it needed from the bank to fund various state activities, many small cultivators remained cautious of the obligations involved in accepting its capital. Mostly it seems they were wary about using their land as collateral when it could be seized and placed for auction if they defaulted. While taking out loans from local moneylenders or “private banks” could involve interest rates of 12% from “the most honest” to allegedly as much as 20-30%, the law in these situations offered cultivators some protections from having their land taken away for indebtedness.\textsuperscript{173} In addition to the possibility that the bank might seize a farmer’s land, applying for a bank loan involved a number of additional formalities that could also be costly.\textsuperscript{174} Thus even the agricultural bank’s rates ended up being above the legally-set amount of 6%--topping out at 8-9% given the fees involved in taking a loan.\textsuperscript{175} Edouard Saadé insisted that these high rates combined with the heavy guarantees required for relatively small loans did little to help agriculture; rather he suggested the government should drop the rates to 3-4% and give loans that were more in keeping with the guarantees required.\textsuperscript{176}

Such an adjustment would presumably have made the bank’s loans quite attractive to some middling and large farmers who had enough capital and land that they could risk the

\textsuperscript{172} Quataert, “Dilemma,” 223-224.
\textsuperscript{173} Issawi, \textit{Fertile Crescent}, 76; Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 28, İslamoğlu, “Property as a Contested Domain: A Reevaluation if the Ottoman Land Code of 1858,” in Roger Owen, ed., \textit{New Perspectives on Property and Land in the Middle East} (Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed for the Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 2000), 31-32. The law also apparently capped the rate of interest at 3% but this did not seem to be effective (Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 28). The British consul claimed the rate could be as much as 20-30% in Aleppo, while T. Saade suggested the range could be 10, 12, or even 15% (Issawi, \textit{Fertile Crescent}, 76, T. Saadé, \textit{Essai}, 42). It is unclear if this difference is a result of exaggeration or location—the Saadés seem to take most of their statistics from Latakia, or year—the British consul is writing in 1890, the Saadés in 1905.

\textsuperscript{174} Issawi, \textit{Fertile Crescent}, 76. In this report from the British consul in Aleppo dated 1890, he notes that since the creation of the bank two years before it had loaned 200 pounds out of a 5000 pound capital and that given peasants’ land values their loans ranged from 3-10 pounds.

\textsuperscript{175} Edouard Saadé, \textit{L’Agriculture à Lattaquié} (Beauvais: Imprimerie Départementale de l’Oise, 1905), 21.

\textsuperscript{176} E. Saade, \textit{L’Agriculture}, 21.
potential of losing part of it, but this would not necessarily solve the problem for subsistence level peasants whose land likely produced just enough for their sustenance needs, seed for the next year, and maybe enough of a surplus that would enable them to pay back part of any outstanding debts. To lose any part of this land would be devastating. Nonetheless, the prevailing technocratic logic persisted that land needed to be available as collateral if farmers were to pursue more capital-intensive forms of farming.

If small farmers were reluctant to take out loans, officials increasingly considered lands worked under musha‘ or collective rotational arrangements to be incompatible with bank lending practices. The agricultural bank’s general director identified this practice, which he defined as “within the borders of a village having lands without distinction tied to a land deed in that village name, one year one farmer cultivates a field, the next year that field he leaves and sows another field” (bir kariye hududu dahilindeki arazi bilatefrik o kariye namine sened haqamiya merbut olmasıyla bir sene bir tarlayı zira‘ eden bir çiftçi ertesi sene o tarlayı bırakıp ahar bir tarlayı ekmekte), as particularly prevalent in Syria where it was an obstacle to agriculture’s “improvement” (i‘mar). Typically worked through a rotation of parcels held as shares among villagers, this form of land tenure defined a number of areas under cultivation, especially in key grain-growing regions such as the Hawran. However, the commonly-held nature of the land in

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177 On the rural middle class see Beshara Doumani, Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 132-134.
178 BOA, DH.ID 2.29, General Director of the Agricultural Bank to the Interior Ministry, 24 Mayis 1330 [6 June 1914].
the village’s name meant that by 1914 at least Ottoman officials viewed this form of land tenure as contributing to farmers’ poverty, making it by extension a problem for the treasury.\textsuperscript{180}

This perspective from the Agricultural Bank’s general director, which he pronounced in the name of the Commerce and Agriculture Minister, can perhaps be traced back to renewed Ottoman attempts to undertake a cadastral survey. While various cadastral processes had been initiated over the course of the nineteenth century,\textsuperscript{181} in 1912, the Ottoman government introduced legislation for a new cadastral survey that would change terms for mortgages and allow for “the unification of property categories across all types of land.”\textsuperscript{182} The law can be understood as part of an ongoing process with roots in the 1858 law land, which sought to increase productivity and by extension agricultural revenue.\textsuperscript{183} While I have found no evidence that the 1912 law achieved implementation in Bilad al-Sham, land policies aimed at making land more agriculturally productive, in particular considerations for how to break up musha’ in Syria were definitely under discussion in the Council of State and the province’s general council by 1912.

Officials considered these lands inimical to agricultural development particularly because they presented a challenge to being used as security for bank loans. In April 1912, the Council of State responded to a communication from the province’s general council concerning its decision to assign individual titles to shares in musha’ property. For those who would not give their

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\item[180]\textsuperscript{BOA, DH.İD 2.29, General Director of the Agricultural Bank to the Interior Ministry, 24 May 1330 [6 June 1914].}
\item[181]See İslamoğlu, “Politics,” 303-304 for the 1840-42 attempt; Shaw, “Reforms,” 426-7 for a summary of what unfolded from 1858-1908 with the promulgation of new tapu regulations; Mundy and Saumarez Smith, \textit{Governing}.\textsuperscript{182} Mundy and Saumarez Smith, \textit{Governing}, 52.
\item[183]Doumani, \textit{Rediscovering}, 159. Such an interpretation stands in contrast to earlier perspectives that argued it was primarily a means whereby large landowners could consolidate smaller peasant landholdings. For another well-documented refutation of this argument see Mundy and Saumarez Smith. İslamoğlu meanwhile contrasts the Ottoman capacity to pass the 1858 Land Code and codify on some level property rights with the French inability to pass a rural code until the 1880s due to the “intransigence of the propertied classes” (İslamoğlu, “Property,” 33).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Consent to this division, they would be subject to another decision. In 1914, both the governor of Syria and the general director of the agricultural bank wrote to the Interior Ministry in support of dividing *musha'* and assigning parcels individually specifically in order, according to the Agricultural Bank’s general director, to facilitate borrowing from the agricultural bank (*her köy arazisinin tefrik ve taksimiyle eştası namlarına ayrı ayrı senedat hakaniyeye raht olunarak umum zürrâ’in ziraat bankasından istiqraz ve istifadelerinin teshil ve temini lüzumu*). Without this capacity, the governor insisted the result was an “exceptionally negative impact” (*fevk-ilade su’-i tesir*) on the “land’s improvement and agriculture’s progress” (*arazinin ‘imarine ve ziraatın terakkisine*). The general director of the agricultural bank discussed this as a problem particularly in Selemiye and Dera’a. Indicating that mukhtars would be brought in and informed of the “pleasing situation,” the governor of Syria insisted that serious effort needed to be undertaken to complete these divisions. While the documents do not provide any insight into how farmers felt about the urgency with which officials pursued these reforms, they do suggest that there was at least the possibility that some were not willing to have their collectively-held land divided.

“Individualisme agraire” has deep roots in Physiocratic thought about how to make the cultivator more productive and legible to the centralizing state, but the process of dividing and individually assigning communally-held lands also has a highly contentious history as these

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184 BOA, DH.İD 2.29, Council of State decision, 8 Nisan 1328 [21 Nisan 1912].
185 BOA, DH.İD 2.29, General Director of the Agricultural Bank to the Interior Ministry, 24 Mayis 1330 [6 June 1914]; Syria’s governor Mehmet Akif to the Interior Ministry, 9 Temmuz 1330 [22 July 1914]. The phrase translates as “the necessity to procure and facilitate the farmers’ use and borrowing in general from the agriculture bank by attaching people’s names individually to imperial land deeds with the detachment and division of the land of every village.”
186 BOA, DH.İD 2.29, Syria’s governor Mehmet Akif to the Interior Ministry, 9 Temmuz 1330 [22 July 1914].
187 BOA, DH.İD 2.29, General Director of the Agricultural Bank to the Interior Ministry, 24 Mayis 1330 [6 June 1914].
188 BOA, DH.İD 2.29, Syria’s governor Mehmet Akif to the Interior Ministry, 9 Temmuz 1330 [22 July 1914].
forms of land tenure offered crucial protections to subsistence-level peasants.\textsuperscript{189} While government technocrats reveled in the increased productivity and additional revenues they expected from individualizing land holdings, Medawar acknowledged the particular concerns of farmers regarding “individualisme” especially in relation to the exigencies of capital exploitation. He noted that they “hesitate to engage their capital in such a struggle, especially if one has to support it alone” since “it cannot give security nor overcome routine.”\textsuperscript{190} At the same time Medawar was also an advocate of more capital-intensive exploitation, identifying capital as the only thing that “would give rapid progress.”\textsuperscript{191} Thus to counterbalance the insecurities and risks it held, he urged the formation of agricultural societies that would embolden farmers to take risks to experiment with new methods that they would not take alone. In his opinion, “one of the biggest economic errors that had generated from the beginning more catastrophes consisted precisely in wanting to lead enterprises of intensive high culture with insufficient capital.”\textsuperscript{192} If communal landholdings needed to be detached and divided to facilitate capital infiltration then he appears to suggest agricultural societies could provide a way to amass this capital and spread the risks that had previously been spread through the land itself.

Given what was at stake, local elites insisted on the necessity of state support, although it could take different forms. When Medawar made his proposals in 1903, he recognized the state’s limited resources for agricultural investment and suggested that agricultural initiatives such as irrigation expansion, transportation, and “agricultural speculations,” which he defined more generally as cultivation initiatives, would best be undertaken by agricultural associations.\textsuperscript{193}

\textsuperscript{190} Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 34.
\textsuperscript{191} Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 33.
\textsuperscript{192} Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 39-40.
\textsuperscript{193} Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 35-36.
While the state could not be relied on for financial underwriting, it should nonetheless take an active stance in supporting these initiatives. He insisted that big landowners were in favor of where things were going, but knew “that this train advances at the step of a camel, but they count on the government to attach the most modern motors.”\textsuperscript{194} The state needed to value the contributions of rural areas as much as it did those of urban areas.\textsuperscript{195} With the state behind these projects, these agricultural associations could then serve as a means of mediating between it and cultivators—a role that E. Saadé likened to that of syndicates in France—while also pooling capital resources and distributing risk.\textsuperscript{196}

On one level then the formation of the Ottoman Agricultural Society after the 1908 second constitutional revolution could be seen as an empire-level response to these perceived needs and concerns. But with the new constitutional regime in power the members of the Society espoused not only a vision for what the society would accomplish on its own initiative, but what the government should be expected to undertake to protect and nurture its farming population. Kazım, writing in the first issue of the Society’s journal, declared that “in no matter what country, agriculture and agricultural industries’ desired degree of maturation is dependent on the more energy and effort that the government expends.”\textsuperscript{197} Among the means by which the government could pursue this support were through trade covenants, a protection regime, expanding transportation networks, and establishing agricultural banks.\textsuperscript{198} The Ottoman Agricultural Society’s founders had established it with the expressed intent of working to ensure the government pursued these means of serving the agricultural sector and providing a basic

\textsuperscript{194} Médawar, \textit{La Syrie}, 35.  
\textsuperscript{195} E. Saadé, \textit{L’Agriculture}, 20.  
\textsuperscript{196} E. Saadé, \textit{L’Agriculture}, 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{198} Kazım, “Bir Ziraat,” 7.
livelihood for farmers. Their journal would thus report on the “agricultural needs of the country” (memleket), highlight whence derived some of the desperate situations in which many farmers lived, and work “for this respected nation’s (watan) economic and social progress.”

While such proposals spoke in terms of the state’s role in encouraging agriculture, these elite technocrats seem to have been especially intent to carve out a mediatory role for themselves between rural and urban spaces, a role sanctioned by their scientific expertise acquired through participation in global and imperial networks of like-minded technocratic specialists. It is telling perhaps that as far as the students from Beauvais were concerned the state’s main financial priority if it lacked resources for more expensive projects should be focused on investment in agricultural education. Their suggested methods could involve establishing an agricultural school that would train agronomes to travel the countryside and educate people or, if a school were too expensive, incorporating classes about agriculture into existing schools or supporting free agricultural conferences. That is, one of the government’s primary tasks in its support for agriculture was to assist in carving out a space where specialized knowledge about it could be produced. The aim was to recognize agriculture as a modern practice that could be considered a career with “incontestable advantages” and a science requiring “serious studies” just like medicine. As such, it would then attract elite investment, both financially and intellectually.

In fact, E. Saadé suggested that large proprietors, despite the obvious financial benefits they derived from agriculture, found that it “provoked scorn…[because they] imagine themselves humiliated when they engage in the culture of the soil.” Until now, elite landowners had largely depended on intermediaries, whether some form of supervisor or peasants, to manage

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201 Médawar, La Syrie, 30-31; E. Saadé, L’Agriculture, 11.
203 E. Saadé, L’Agriculture, 10.
their agricultural interests.\textsuperscript{204} With agriculture as a science to be taught in school and learned from books, they would now have the knowledge to intervene and not only not, or so they presumed, risk embarrassment, but demonstrate what they considered a superior form of agricultural expertise. While agricultural education might be portrayed as a form of peasant enlightenment, for these elite students who had studied in France, the more pressing concern was for the enlightenment of large landowners, a project seen as integrally tied to a representation of certain kinds of agricultural knowledge as scientific and thus worthy of formal study and institutionalized development supported by the state.

\textbf{Conclusion}

This insistence on education evokes one of the main concerns of the Ottoman administrators introduced in the beginning of this chapter. They had insisted on deeming the agriculture that they traveled the world to study a distinct form of agricultural practice—an agriculture defined by science. In doing so they sought to raise its esteem and profile among urban populations as well as rural communities, although these latter communities were apparently quite skeptical. While on the one hand it is possible to see this language as initially about elevating agriculture as a form of scientific knowledge in order to increase its status and encourage urban elites to take an interest in rural occupations, it also became a way of representing and legitimating certain derivations of knowledge and forms of practice over others.

The Ottoman government had long had an interest in agricultural education in some form whether it was agronomists traveling the countryside after the establishment in 1843 of an

\textsuperscript{204} E. Saadé, \textit{L’Agriculture}, 10.
Agriculture Council or an attempt to establish an agricultural school in the late 1840s. But the latter decades of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth saw a rapid expansion in these efforts as institutions and policies designed to promote “scientific” agriculture increased. Reşid Bey was one of their earliest enthusiasts and Hüseyin Kazım saw this technocratic enthusiasm arrive at the very core of constitutional government. Even the renowned Arab nationalist educator, Sati’ al-Husri, spent his early career writing agricultural textbooks in Ottoman for the empire’s Education Ministry. From international networks engaged in circulating ideas about new techniques, instruments, and administrative strategies, Ottoman technocrats and bureaucrats brought these experiences to imperial and local networks. The state and its representatives in turn explored how to pursue administrative strategies that would enable it to assert more control over the inputs into agricultural production as well as the outputs—how to implement new forms of “governmentality.” The next chapter looks more specifically at how these dynamics played out in the establishment of a network of agricultural schools and model farms and fields and their role in the production of “scientific” agricultural expertise.

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206 See for example Mustafa Sati el-Husri, Malumat-ı ziraie (İstanbul: Karabet Matbaası (1321 [1904]); Mebadî-ı ulum-ı tabiyyeden hikmet ve kimya: tatbikat-ı ziraie, sınaiye, sikiyiye ve beytiyeleri (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriye ve Şürekâsi, 1327 [1911]); Mebadî-ı ulum-ı tabiyyeden tatbikat-ı ziraie (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Hayriye ve Şürekâsi, 1328 [1912]). The 1904 book notes that it was authorized by the Education Ministry’s special commission for instruction in the second and third years of high schools.
Chapter 2

“AGRICULTURE FROM A BOOK”: ELITES, EXPERTISE, AND SCIENTIFIC AGRICULTURE IN LATE OTTOMAN BILAD AL-SHAM

When Rafiq Tamimi, the Beirut commerce school’s director, and Mehmet Behcet, the Sultani school’s assistant director, produced their two-volume report on the province of Beyrut in 1917 at the behest of Beirut’s governor, Azmi Bey, they invited Hüseyin Kazım, a once prominent member of the Committee of Union and Progress who had since fallen out with the party and was residing in Beirut in self-imposed exile, to write the section on “Agricultural Matters” for the province. By this point, Kazım, in addition to translating a French agricultural textbook, had published seven Ottoman books on agriculture including two intended for use in village schools and distributed by the Müdafaa-i Milliye Cemiyeti (Society for National Defense) as discussed in chapter one. His reputation as an expert on matters of scientific agriculture was well-established (umur-u zira‘iye hakkında vukuf ve ihtisasyla ma‘rif) in certain circles at least. In his contribution to Beyrut Vilayeti, Kazım went a bit beyond the book’s remit and penned an essay entitled “A Few Words on Syria’s Agriculture” in which he expounded on his vision for developing agriculture not only in the province of Beirut, but also in Syria more generally. Claiming a global phenomenon in which agriculture was experiencing increasingly diminishing returns, he heralded the scientific processes that were producing mineral and

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207 See Hüseyin Kazım, Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Hatıralarım (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2000), 136-139.
208 Hüseyin Kazım, “A Few Words on Syria’s Agriculture” in Beyrut Vilayeti, compiled by Mehmet Refik and Mehmet Behcet (Beyrut: Vilayet Matbaası, 1333[1917]), 58. Kazım would also contribute a section on agriculture entitled “A Theoretical Glance at Agriculture [Lamha Nazariya fi al-Zira‘a]” to Isma‘il Haqqi Bey’s study of Mt. Lebanon in which he would also offer suggestions for improving that region’s agriculture, namely establishing forests on mountains tops where land was not suitable for agriculture, creating permanent or temporary pastures, increasing fruit tree cultivation, and paying greater attention to vegetable cultivation (378). He was apparently an expert much in demand. See Isma‘il Haqqi Bey, Lubnan, Mabahith ‘ilmiyah wa-ijtima’iyah, vol. 2 (Beirut, 1970 [1918]), 367-379.
209 Given the administrative divisions of the region into the provinces of Beirut, Syria and Aleppo, his proposal does not refer to Aleppo specifically, where he seems to consider developments are more in line with those in Anatolia. Nonetheless, his general vision for agricultural development would seem to apply there as well.
industrial materials that could replenish the soil. Whereas previously farmers had depended on
“alternating agriculture” (*ziraat mütenavibe*), now “by science and industry humankind found
ways to enable domination (*tahakküm*) of nature and land and searched for remedies to weather
and climatic events.”

Citing the Phoenicians and Romans as examples of ancient civilizations
that had flourished and been nourished on the region’s abundance, Syria, he insisted, was even
more fertile than other provinces of the empire. While the environment had changed since the
ancient period—according to his assessment there were fewer forests, riverbeds had silted up and
risen, the soil’s fertility had diminished, and swamps had formed—the suitability of the region’s
soil and its climate remained.

In making his case for why investments in the region would provide good returns, he
stressed the variety of food crops and industries that would thrive given the region’s climatic
conditions and soil. In addition to the staple crops of wheat and barley, he urged increased
planting of other food crops such as broad beans, green vegetables, millet, lentils, potatoes, beets,
and carrots. He also touted the region’s suitability for fruit trees and various agricultural
industries such as chicken raising and butter-related products. Ultimately the goal would be to
transition from extensive to intensive agriculture, but given local social and economic conditions
he acknowledged extensive agriculture was currently more “suitable” (*uygun*) for the region.

For intensive agriculture, which required lavish inputs of capital, additional preparations were
necessary. Despite these challenges, which are further described below, he proclaimed that if
the Ottoman administration could bring to bear on the agriculture of the region all the fruits of

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210 Kazım, “A Few Words,” 59. *Ziraat mütenavibe* refers to rotational agriculture, although he does not specify
whether this refers to biennial or triennial rotation or both.
211 Kazım, “A Few Words,” 60.
212 Kazım, “A Few Words,” 60.
science and industry, in a short time Syria could become one of the most progressive agricultural areas in the world (Suriye az vakitte dünyanın en müteraaksi ziraat memleketleri sırasına geçer). Kazım’s essay reflected ideas shared by the growing group of technocratically-minded bureaucrats and administrators within the empire who were enthusiastic about the possibilities presented by mechanization and new fertilizers, but who also recognized that accessing these possibilities would be a time and capital intensive process. As Kazım wrote his essay, already attempts to introduce into the region the institutions and infrastructure associated with scientific agriculture had been ongoing for several decades. As suggested by his report, however, its implementation had been uneven and complex, encountering obstacles in both the bureaucratic and natural worlds.

The following chapter traces the implementation of various programs in the region that aimed to introduce the methods of scientific agriculture described by Kazım. Starting in the 1890s, parallel to the developments discussed in chapter 1, on the ground in Bilad al-Sham there were ongoing efforts to encourage agricultural education and the introduction of new methods in a variety of forms--either by demonstrations at local model farms and fields or by incorporating agriculture classes into existing schools or through establishing schools specifically for agricultural experimentation. All of these projects were part of broader empire-wide initiatives to introduce scientific agriculture to local farmers. This chapter examines these developments more closely and considers the implications of the actual process through which they were instituted and the resulting consequences. While center-directed proposals and programs existed, what actually happened on the ground often seems to have often been as much a factor of local initiative and agency as it was a product of Istanbul-directed programs. The individual actors involved were largely responsible for the specific directions they took.

Furthermore, although official rhetoric emphasized peasant enfranchisement and enlightenment as a part of this process, during this period scientific agriculture remained largely an elite project and local subalterns recognized it as such. It was even a trend remarked upon in the journals of foreign commercial interests—one author in the *Levant Trade Review*, directed at American commercial concerns, explained to readers that “While, some years ago, the rural population of Turkey began to quit the native soil, being attracted towards the town by the vision of luxury and welfare, an opposite current of ideas is manifesting itself among the well to do classes. Young men of wealth look towards the farm finding a brighter future in the agricultural line and especially in the dairy farming industry, than in commerce.”\(^{218}\) While this distinction is perhaps a bit overstated since increasing commerce was integrally associated with improving agriculture, elite enthusiasm for new methods was clear. Access to these methods was also largely limited to them— the most elite provincial schools included agriculture classes and officials restricted admission to agricultural institutions.

Along with these trends new definitions of what constituted agricultural expertise emerged. Over time local knowledge became less acknowledged as a valuable source by the bureaucratic elite as knowledge certified by institutions gained legitimacy and status. This knowledge was to be distinguished with a new epithet—*fenn-i ziraat*, the “science of agriculture.” Despite the increasing prevalence of this distinction, Ottoman practices regarding agricultural development nonetheless aimed at a holistic approach to exploiting the resources delimited by a region’s specific ecology. Although Ottoman rhetoric emphasized the novelty and break from the past represented by scientific agriculture, Ottoman practice often relied on existing local specializations, whether in terms of livestock, crops, or methods, that had been

\(^{218}\) J. Behar, “Dairy Industry in the Turkish Empire,” *Levant Trade Review*, 6, no. 1 (June 1916), 186.
developed over time through local expertise to determine the best programs and projects to implement according to a region’s ecological profile.

These administrative policies do seem to have borne fruit--much has been written about the flourishing of agriculture in the region during this period.219 This expansion primarily involved increasing extensive rather than capital-requiring intensive agriculture and its remarkable nature was due to several trends. First, an expanding gendarme force in the region provided “security” aimed in particular at preventing local pastoralists from encroaching on lands now allotted for agriculture.220 Second, refugees were being resettled on cultivable land in the region and were often provided with tools and animals to get them started.221 Finally, the region boasted a growing transport network, including French-owned rails radiating off a line established between Damascus and the Hawran in 1894 and gradually expanding over a sixteen year span to include service to Beirut, Hama, Aleppo, and Tripoli as well as the Ottoman-financed Hijaz railway which also provided service between Damascus and the Hawran and thus

219 Mark Sykes’s oft-quoted observations provide evidence of this expansion, particularly in the area around Aleppo. Norman Lewis quotes him as remarking in 1903 that “The whole country appears to be in a wonderfully flourishing condition. Huge tracts of rich, ploughed land…bespeak a new era for north Syria” (Norman Lewis, Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 1800-1980 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 55). He was even more effusive in 1906 when he traveled from Aleppo towards Meskene, located close to a bend in the Euphrates, noting that “as far as the eye can see, there stretches a glorious tract of corn-bearing land” (Lewis, Nomads and Settlers, 55). Owen includes this same quote (Roger Owen, The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800-1914 (London: Methuen, 1981), 245) and Hamidé contends that Sykes claims to have counted 56 new villages constructed in three years (Abdul-Rahman Hamidé, La Région d’Aleп: etude de géographie rurale (Paris, 1959), 176). For the most part, these were likely villages established on the sultan’s imperial estates east of Aleppo. Protected by gendarmes, they could be settled and farmed on relatively advantageous terms—10% of the crop to pay the a’shar tax, 7% for land rent, and no other taxes except that on sheep (Lewis, Nomads and Settlers, 53-54).

220 For increasing gendarme security see ‘Izzaldin al-Sarraj, “Mustaqbalna al-Zira‘i,” al-Ittihad al-Osmani, 5 Kanunuevvel 1913. The article indicates that 7000 had been posted to Anatolia and another 9000 were going to be sent to various provinces. See also Hüseyin Kazım’s report on Aleppo were he lays out his plans for increasing security in the province, particularly though the employment of additional gendarmes (BOA, DH.ID 44-1.33, Kazim to the Interior Ministry, 26 Kanunuevvel 1326 [8 January 1911]).

221 For immigrants, tools, and animals see BOA, ŞD 2296.42, High Commission on Islamic Immigrants to the Council of State, 12 Teşrinisani 1319 [25 November 1903] and BOA, BEO 3853.288951, Sublime Porte to the head of Parliament, 19 Kanunusani 1326 [1 February 1911].
competition to the French concern.\textsuperscript{222} Such factors not only facilitated the expansion of
cultivation and the ability to ship surplus products economically, they also provided incentives
for further government and local investment in land improvements and new technologies.

Despite the measured reliability implied by a theoretical science of agriculture,
agricultural practice, as it turned out, was a rather complicated affair. For excitement over new
machines and technologies to be translated into actual results, new crops or methods had to be
tested before they could be grown or practiced on a larger scale and their feasibility had to be
locally demonstrated to reassure farmers that the investment of their land, time and labor was
worth it, not to mention the possibility of additional capital investments.\textsuperscript{223} In order to make
these techniques and plants accessible and observable by local cultivators, administrators
established institutions such as model farms, fields, and agricultural schools that not only
provided space for experimentation but also places to demonstrate to local cultivators these new
methods’ suitability and the capacity of new plants to thrive in local ecologies.

The following chapter will explore these aspects of experimenting with scientific
agriculture in the provinces of Syria, Aleppo and Beirut during the last three decades of the
Ottoman Empire. Despite the fact that the province of Aleppo was well-integrated into Anatolia,
over the course of these decades officials came to consider this region as an administrative unit
for the sake of policies related to agricultural infrastructure. These provinces shared an
agricultural inspector and other documents regarding the construction of agriculture-related
institutions indicate a logic that considered the region agriculturally integrated.\textsuperscript{224}

\textsuperscript{222} Donald Quataert, \textit{The Ottoman Empire, 1700-1922} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 133; Owen, \textit{The Middle East in the World Economy}, 245, 246.
\textsuperscript{223} See Wady Médawar, \textit{La Syrie Agricole} (Beauvais: Imprimerie A. Dumontier, 1903), 33, 39-43 on the importance of assured capital to agricultural expansion.
\textsuperscript{224} See for example, BOA, DH. İD 99.32, Report from the agricultural inspector for Beirut, Syria, and Aleppo provinces, 8 November 1910 and BOA, T.TİZ \text{3056.62}, Report signed by the agricultural school’s director Abdussettatar, 23 Şubat 1327 [4 March 1912].
an essential part of empire-wide planning as officials sought the best ways to exploit the empire’s region-specific resources. Although faced with a number of challenges, resistance from some communities, and encouragement from others, by the eve of World War I, institutions associated with scientific agriculture were gaining momentum, albeit among a relatively select segment of the population.

In tracing this process, its varied impacts, and the differentiated nature of corresponding responses, this chapter examines the agency of local elites and technocratic officials in shaping the implementation on the local level of the ideas circulating in imperial and international networks discussed in chapter one. It also considers the critique of these projects by subaltern actors. A broad-based enthusiasm for these developments among certain landowning circles contradicts claims in the literature that elites were generally disinterested in these technologies. On the other hand, tracing the impacts of these shifts on the local level also clearly delineates how various participants in the region’s agricultural production differentially experienced access to these developments. The responses of certain subaltern actors and communities who contested the notion that these institutions and the expertise they purveyed were of general benefit demonstrates how access to these new technologies was mediated by resources and knowledge available primarily through increasingly hierarchicalized institutions of knowledge production. Despite this expertise’s integration of contributions from local

225 Martin Strohmeier, “Abd al-Rahman Pasha al-Yusuf, a Notable in Damascus (1873/74-1920)” in Antonis Anastasopoulos, ed., Provincial Elites in the Ottoman Empire (Rethymno, Crete: Crete University Press, 2005), 360. Strohmeier quotes from Philip Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 446 and expresses surprise at the “remarkable exception to that rule”---i.e. that landowners did not invest in their lands--represented by a letter from the protagonist of his chapter, Abd al-Rahman Pasha al-Yusuf. The letter, from September 1918, meticulously details al-Yusuf’s plans for agriculturally developing his lands. My research indicates that his plans were in line with those of a number of other large landholders who had the capital to invest and were enthusiastic about the prospects they thought scientific agricultural experimentation promised.
knowledge in its application, officials nonetheless deemed it a distinct approach certified through institutionalized accreditation.\textsuperscript{226}

**Agricultural Experimentation and Its Discontents**

The timing of the establishment and expansion of the infrastructure of model farms and fields and agricultural schools paralleled that of the Agricultural Bank. While the process of building these institutions did not always go according to plan--sometimes for ecological reasons, sometimes for financial ones, and sometimes for reasons unknown—there was nonetheless a clear logic to Ottoman priorities and goals. Namely, officials focused on highly productive agricultural areas that were well-distributed throughout the empire. They also sought to develop local specialities. As this infrastructure grew and the empire’s initial agricultural schools produced more trained specialists the insistence on employing these graduates’ with their institutionally-certified “scientific” agricultural knowledge increased. But state officials were not the only ones invested in these developments, local elites echoed these interests in their own activities and interactions with the state. Thus, in the eastern Mediterranean, elite and state interests together contributed to the expansion of this infrastructure and the increased privileging of what they deemed scientific approaches to agricultural practice.

When Ottoman officials first began to strategize the construction and development of model farms and fields, they seem to have been intent to evenly distribute them throughout the more fertile regions of the empire. Thus the Meclis-i Vükela’s decision issued in October 1888 pinpointed the provinces of Syria and Aleppo along with those of Adana, Konya, Ankara, Sivas, Monastir and Yanya as well as Izmit Sancak for the opening of model and experimental fields

\textsuperscript{226} See for example, Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). As Mitchell puts it “So-called nature formed the expertise…,” although the expertise is constructed as something apart from this process (42).
because of their “agricultural importance.” These fields would serve not only as places where new techniques, seeds, and implements could be tested, but also where agricultural models could be demonstrated to the local residents (ahali). The Public Works 1303 [1887/1888] budget would provide initial funding to the tune of approximately 108,700 gurush with ongoing yearly maintenance funds of 31,200 gurush to be deducted from the fields’ produce. An irade affirming this decision was issued on October 11. Further financial encouragement was forthcoming in 1892 when the reform office (tanzimat dairesi) of the Council of State urged that the production of these model fields be exempted from the tithe and that their buildings not be subject to the vergi (land) tax. A concurring irade was in turn issued.

Officials not only selected areas for their fertility but also for their potential to improve regional specializations. In Aleppo, for example, the model field complex was slated to contain a model stable that would be used “to improve the cattle species for which the region is famous” and would be dedicated to the production of butter and cheese. In its initial conceptualization and purpose the field’s raison d’être was based largely on existing local expertise and resources. Such considerations also suggest that there were some “indigenous traditions” on which local administrators could draw as they sought

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227 BOA, MV 36.31, Meclis-i Vükela’s decision, 15 Eylül 1304 [7 October 1888]. According to the decision, efforts at establishing agricultural schools and model farms had already been started in Edirne, İzmir, Selanik, and the areas around Istanbul.
228 BOA, Y.PRK.ŞD 2.9. See also Donald Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture in Anatolia, 1876-1908” (Ph.D diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1973), 113. Quataert insists based on another document from the Ottoman archives that these fields “primarily directed their efforts towards the average cultivator and stressed on the spot training available to all regardless of age or financial status” (113). It is difficult to evaluate how true this statement was in practice, although there does seem to have been an official intent to make these institutions as accessible as possible.
229 BOA, MV 36.31, Meclis-i Vükela’s decision, 15 Eylül 1304 [7 October 1888].
231 BOA, İ.TNF 1.19, 1310.Cemaziyülevvel.1 [21 November 1892]. See also Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 113.
232 BOA, A.)MKT.MHM 727.31, Report of Aram Efendi, 1310.Şaban.10 [27 February 1893].
to experiment with imported methods and tools, in order to adapt them to local conditions. While the Aleppo field seems to have encountered minimal difficulties in getting its activities underway—by February 1893 operations had started—matters did not proceed as smoothly in the province of Syria. While land was purchased and construction work on the field’s buildings commenced, it was discovered that the lands procured for the field were not in fact appropriate (ghayr-i salih). This finding prompted a decision to transfer the allotted resources to the model farm planned for Edirne. In addition to facing funding and ecological challenges, some model fields also had to be secured against raids.

Outfitting a model field was a costly prospect, but, despite the empire’s strained budget, funds for these projects seem to have been given priority. In addition to the money expended on the field’s buildings, there were wells to be dug and pumps, seeds, feed, and animals to be purchased and transported. In Aleppo, land was bought, but additional funds had to be requested from the Sublime Porte for the completion of the field’s buildings. By May 1893, of the 30,000 gurush allotted for the field’s construction, almost 27,000 had already been spent on construction expenses, but at least 20,000 gurush were still needed to purchase and transport a

233 Quataert claims that the Halkalı Agricultural School, which was established to train staff and teachers for model fields and agriculture schools and which I will discuss in further detail below, “was unable to draw upon any indigenous tradition of agricultural science and borrowed extensively from the achievements of the West” (“Ottoman Reform and Agriculture”, 103). While the school and its staff might have been Europe-oriented, looking at the broader spectrum of efforts to develop a local scientific agriculture suggests that “indigenous traditions” were indeed a part of this process.

234 BOA, A.]MKT.MHM 727.31, 1310.Şaban.10 [27 February 1893]. The chart that indicates cultivation is underway is undated, but it seems fair to assume that it was produced around the same time as Aram Efendi’s report dated 15 Şubat 1308 [27 February 1893], which it accompanies.


236 BOA, BEO 245.18314, letter from the Minister of the Hazine-i Hassa, 12 Temmuz 1309 [24 July 1893]. This document actually refers to raids on the Aleppo Çiftlikat-i Hümayun and its nümune çiftliği (model farm) by the Anaza. The Anaza was one of the main pastoral groups that inhabited the eastern Syrian desert. It seems plausible that the model farm referred to was located at Abou Qalqal, which was at the far eastern edge of the sultan’s lands bordering on the Euphrates, and is described by Hamidé as the place of a “model garden...that was a absolute opulent oasis.” See Hamidé, La région d’Alep, 174, 176. See also Lewis, Nomads and Settlers, 8-12 (on the ‘Anazah) and 53-54 (on the sultan’s imperial estates).

237 BOA, A.]MKT.MHM 727.31, 1310.Şaban.10 [27 February 1893], see undated chart.
European-made pump for the field’s new well. Citing the importance of reform to increasing harvests, the Council of State allotted additional funding to the Commerce and Public Works Ministry for the field from the 100,000 gurush held as reserve cash in hand (akçe) for agricultural purposes. In September 1894, the newly-appointed agriculture minister Selim Malhamé Bey, a Maronite Levantine, ordered the agricultural bank to provide an additional 3,000 gurush each to the Aleppo model field, as well as fields in Konya, Erzurum, and Sivas along with the Hudavendigar model farm to buy the necessary instruments for recording temperature and tracking changing weather conditions. Provincial agricultural banks served as crucial sources of funding for field needs. When the model field in Aleppo could not produce enough barley and edible vetch to feed its animals, the Agricultural Minister requested the agricultural bank to hand over 2,500 gurush for both animal feed and seeds. In late 1895, he insisted on another large sum, 29,780 gurush 17 para, from the Commerce and Public Works Ministry to underwrite the completion of the model field’s dairy and director’s office, including funds for incorporating windows in the granary and stable and establishing a shady reservoir near the stable. Exempting materials, such as the pump and tools ordered from Europe for the field,

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238 BOA, İ.O.M 1.2, Decision from Council of State, 15 Mayis 1309 [27 May 1893]. See also BOA, BEO 244.18275, Draft dated 12 Temmuz 1309 [24 July 1893] for further details on the amounts allotted for the field. BOA, ŞD 519.15, Letter from the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 1 Şubat 1310 [13 February 1895] and BOA, Y.PRK.ŞD 2.9, Council of State note, 2 Mart 1310 [14 March 1894] also detail how these funds were available to make up the 9,500 gruş needed for the Aleppo model field to purchase two pairs of oxen.

239 BOA, ŞD 518.8, letter from the Forest, Mines and Agriculture Minister, 11 Eylül 1310 [23 September 1894]. Selim had been appointed in February 1893 (Kuneralp, 9) and would have a rather long and checkered history in the position, eventually fleeing the country in the wake of the 1908 CUP revolution. See Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 72-75 and Jens Hanssen, “Malhamé-Malfamé”: Levantine Elites and Transimperial Networks on the Eve of the Young Turk Revolution,” International journal of Middle East studies, vol. 43, no. 1, (2011): 25-48. Quataert suggests that internal intrigues provoked by Selim’s antagonistic way of politics—he was a favorite of the sultan’s but despised by other officials, such as the Agricultural Bank director—could have been responsible for delays in funding for various agricultural projects (75).

240 BOA, BEO 509.38170, Letter from the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 15 Teşrinievvel 1310 [27 October 1894].

241 BOA, ŞD 521.39, Letter from the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 15 Teşrinisani 1311 [27 Kasım 1895].
from custom dues eased costs.\textsuperscript{242} Such exemptions underline the Ottoman center’s commitment to these projects.\textsuperscript{243} To further lower costs, more established agricultural institutions could also serve as breeding grounds for animals which were then sent to newer model fields in other provinces. In January 1895, the practical agricultural school in Hudavendigar sent a bull each to the Aleppo and Konya model fields with the reserve agriculture budget instructed to cover the transfer costs.\textsuperscript{244}

In order to staff this expanding network of model fields, parallel with the developments discussed above, the government supported the establishment in Istanbul of the Halkali Agricultural School (\textit{Halkali Ziraat Mektebi}), which accepted its first general agricultural student class in 1892, and encouraged the founding of two applied agricultural schools in Salonika and Bursa.\textsuperscript{245} From 700 applicants, the Halkali Agricultural School accepted 30 for its first class.\textsuperscript{246} The stipulations that enabled these students to be nominated in the first place underline the elite nature of the school’s program. Their parents had to be cultivators and they had to demonstrate their “knowledge of mathematics, geography, Turkish, French, and the tithe laws.”\textsuperscript{247} Similar requirements were also stipulated for the Bursa school in addition to which potential students had to agree, in the event that they did not complete the program, to pay the state sixteen gold liras per year attended.\textsuperscript{248} Obviously, such guarantees could only be offered by the well-to-do. The Halkali Agricultural School’s faculty also attested to its elite status—at least four of its instructors had attended European agricultural schools, others had served as provincial

\begin{footnotes}
\item[243] It should be noted that the customs exemptions list was continuously updated to include only equipment still deemed “modern” (Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 162).
\item[244] BOA, ŞD 519.2, Letter from the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister, 10 Kanunusani 1310 [22 January 1895].
\item[245] Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 94; 98. The Bursa school opened in 1891.
\item[246] Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 94.
\item[247] Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 94.
\end{footnotes}
inspectors, and others came from the school’s own students as they started to graduate.\textsuperscript{249} Its graduates could aim to reach the first rank in the empire’s bureaucratic hierarchy and a monthly salary of 3000 piasters (gurush).\textsuperscript{250} However, since both schools’ programs required three years of study, which was eventually extended to four for the Halkalı Agricultural School, clearly the first group of graduates was not immediately available to staff the recently opened model fields. Nonetheless the central government as well as local scientific agriculture enthusiasts were anxious to begin experimentation. The ensuing process of determining qualified individuals to run these institutions provides insight into shifting conceptions of expertise during this period that saw an increasing priority given to book-based agricultural knowledge and the emergence of a hierarchy of expertise determined by institutional affiliation.

A closer look at the evolving operations of the Aleppo model field in particular demonstrates not only the workings of such an institution, but also the changing internal networks of knowledge and expertise on which it drew. Initially locals formed the majority of the field’s staff—a daily log of the field’s activities covering June 1896 to early January 1897 demonstrates their varied roles and the field’s main activities. The head farmer, Ahmet, aged 47 and illiterate, came from the village of Tel Jibin near Aleppo. He first worked in the field for two months for a 150 gurush salary, and, after receiving permission to continue, worked another three years for an eight mecdiye salary (maaş).\textsuperscript{251} His fellow field worker, Hamud (30), also came from the Aleppo region while Serkis (28) hailed from Harput. These workers, referred to as

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\textsuperscript{249} Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 97-98. See also chapter 3 “The Development of the Agrarian Bureaucracy” for a fuller discussion of which officials attended specific German or French agricultural schools (“Ottoman Reform and Agriculture”, 64-91).
\textsuperscript{250} Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture,” 103.
\textsuperscript{251} BOA, ŞD 2232.6, “Head farmer Ahmed’s testimony,” 28 Kanunuevvel 1312 [28 January 1897]. Ahmet Bey indicates that 1 mecdiye equals 19 ğruş—i.e. he was receiving a 152 gurush salary. Although Ahmed was apparently illiterate he does sign his testimony with a signet seal, perhaps indicating a certain social status in the community. (In the court proceedings that will be discussed below regarding the Selemiye agricultural school, the poorest farmers and sharecroppers tended to sign with a thumbprint.)
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“yanaşma,” or hirelings, do not appear to have had any particular institutionally-acquired expertise but do appear to have been rather indebted and loyal to the field’s director, Melkon Efendi.252 The field staff also included an ironsmith Agop, 36, from Urfa who was responsible for repairing the field’s tools, a servant for Melkon, a guard, and a veterinarian (baytar), Faris, 55, who was also from Aleppo and whose primary work seems to have consisted of keeping the field’s animals, which included a pair of oxen and another of work horses, well-shod.253 The field clearly had a substantial staff to oversee its operations. Nonetheless, except for perhaps Melkon, there is no indication that its farmers and workers had any institutional training.254 Rather their local knowledge of agrarian practice was what made them valuable to the field’s work.

The fields’ crops and activities were diverse. Among the plants grown were barley, wheat (including a wheat specifically designated as local (yerli hıntı)), “Hungarian” provender (majar ‘alefi), corn (musir dari), flax, potatoes, “bird” provender (kuş ‘alefi), and chamomile. By the spring of 1907, experiments with American varieties of cotton would also be underway in the field.255 The field’s staff also planted and diligently watered poplars and mulberry trees and dug wells.256 The field’s daily work log documented the instruments used and the amounts of ploughed land versus wasteland they were able to plough in a morning, evening or both. Their

252 See BOA, ŞD 2232.6, inspector’s report dated 29 Teşrinisani 1317 [12 December 1901]. Perhaps this is emphasized because Melkon during the period described in the documents was under investigation for embezzling field funds. The model fields appear to have been somewhat prone to this. Quataert mentions that this was also a problem in the Ankara model field (Quataert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture”, 115).

253 BOA, ŞD 2232.6, information gathered from a various testimonies dated 28 Kanunuevvel 1312 [28 January 1897]; Field’s work log from June 1896 to early January 1897. The oxen were named “Sarı” and “Maviru.” It is unclear if these are their names, types, or color—“sarı” for example can mean yellow. The horses were named “Zeytuna” and “Bebe.” Zeytuna may have died as her name disappears from the records around September 14 and “Kamer” or “Moon” appears.

254 I have thus far been unable to confirm his educational background, although it seems he might have had some training in Europe.

255 BOA, T.ZTI 3047.40, Forest, Mines and Agriculture Ministry to the Aleppo Model Field Director’s representative, 2 May 1907; BOA, T.ZTI 3047.44, Forest, Mines and Agriculture Ministry to the Province of Syria’s Agriculture Inspectorship, 2 May 1907.

256 BOA, ŞD 2232.6, Field’s work log from June 1896 to early January 1897.
experiments included the use of local plows (yerli sapan) alongside foreign plows (Frank sapan) as well as a threshing machine (orak makinesi). The log often included the temperature’s highs and lows for each day. Clearly a very systematic process of experimentation, calculation, and observation had been established for the field’s activities. However, while the field drew primarily on local farming expertise, its director, Melkon Efendi, was in contact with larger imperial and international networks of those invested in the spread of scientific agriculture.257

In addition to establishing model farms and fields, the Ministry of Agriculture also encouraged the opening of agriculture “branches” in local elementary and preparatory schools. Ideally the teachers in such branches would have been trained at the Halkalı Ziraat Mektebi in Istanbul, but when such instructors were not available, the schools could turn to local sources of agricultural knowledge. In September 1900, when the education ministry announced a plan to open an agriculture branch in the Aleppo preparatory (‘idadi) school, the Aleppo education directorship found itself unable to secure specialists (erbab-i ihtisas) from the Istanbul school.258 As a result, Ahmet Hamdi, who had “come from” the Salonika agricultural school and was the Aleppo model field’s assistant director, agreed to take on the task of designing and teaching the program.259 Given that other duties of his position often caused him to be absent, in the end a group of six different teachers, including Hamdi Efendi, were assigned to teach an array of fourteen different agriculture classes. The appointed teachers were all graduates of Ottoman high schools and some had practical local experience in agricultural matters. In addition to Hamdi

257 See for example BOA, ŞD 2231.6, Copy of the Aleppo model field director Melkon Efendi’s testimony, 24 Şubat 1312 [8 March 1897]. In fact, it appears to have been a series of letters exchanged with Amasyan Efendi, the Minister of Agriculture, Aram Efendi, the president of the scientific agriculture association (ziraat heyet-i fenniye), and Nubar Pasha, the Egyptian minister, that got him into trouble.
258 BOA, MF.MKT 677.57, Aleppo education director’s deputy Mehmet to the Education Ministry, 14 Kanunuevel 1318 [27 December 1902].
259 BOA, MF.MKT, 694.33, Aleppo Education Director Celaluddin to the Education Ministry, 4 Kanunusani 1318 [17 January 1903]. The telegram does not specify that he “graduated from” the schools using instead the vaguer “neş’et” to explain his qualifications. His proposed replacements however are always identified as “graduates” of the Halkalı Ziraat Mektebi.
Efendi and his training at the Salonika school, Shakib, Cevdet, and Abdullah Efendis were graduates of the Mekteb-i Mülkiye, Kemal Efendi had studied at the state veterinarian school (mülki baytar mektebi) and was currently serving as the province’s veterinary inspector, and Nasih Efendi had worked in agriculture since his graduation from the Aleppo ‘idadi school.\textsuperscript{260} 

Despite these local efforts to organize a comprehensive program with locally-knowledgeable staff, by 1902/1903 efforts were underway in Istanbul to further centralize control of the program and ensure the certified expertise of its instructors. Hamdi Efendi, after teaching for two academic years and despite apparently fulfilling his duties with aplomb according to both his and the governor of Aleppo’s assessment, was dismayed when he was not invited back to teach for the 1902-1903 academic year—the third year of the agriculture program—with the result that there were no agriculture classes being offered in the school. Meanwhile the Istanbul newspapers, which he had apparently been following, were full of stories about the reorganization and instruction of agricultural classes in the ‘idadi school (mekteb-i i’dadi-yi ziraat derslerinin tensik ve tedrisatına dair).\textsuperscript{261} Hamdi Efendi clearly felt slighted by these developments, sensing that this buzz in the newspapers was indicative of excitement for the kind of work he had been performing, but also that it potentially spelled the end of his teaching services. In fact, although graduates of the Halkalı Agricultural School were the preferred candidates for the new program, Hamdi Efendi’s local expertise and devotion to the program initially led to a discussion about his suitability for continuing to teach the revised curriculum. The governor and, initially, the administration of the ‘idadi schools suggested that in light of his good service he should be allowed to teach with the appointed salary the courses for which he was qualified—the ‘idadi administration even requested that he be asked what courses he would

\textsuperscript{260} BOA, MF.MKT 694.33, see table from 11 Şubat 1318 [24 February 1903].

\textsuperscript{261} BOA, MF.MKT 681.39, Ahmet Hamdi Efendi to the governor of Aleppo, 24 Teşrinievvel 1318 [6 November 1902].
be interested in and capable of teaching for the agricultural branch. The main issue seems to have been the more advanced lessons of the third year, which Hamdi Efendi was clearly not considered qualified to teach (mahalinca mütehassis muallim bulunmadığı beyanıyla) by either the local education directorship or the ‘idadi administration. After some debate, the ‘idadi administration finally urged the Agriculture Ministry to send two Halkali graduates immediately.

Hamdi Efendi’s fears confirmed, he launched petitions to both the Education Ministry and the Aleppo Education Directorship emphasizing his local knowledge and his commitment to the program. Citing his eight to nine years experience conducting various experiments in the Aleppo model field, he insisted this experience made him the most specialized for the task of teaching in the local school (sekiz dokuz sene zarfında vilayet nümune tarlada müte’ad [sic] tatbikatlarla en ziyade mütehassis olduğum). He also stressed the local initiative and expense he had exerted to ensure the success of the program. Because the school did not have the ability to procure the necessary implements, he had brought them as well as various seeds from the model field to demonstrate seasonally in the classroom. He had also invested his own personal financial resources in the program, taking out loans above and beyond his promised salary, which had not been paid for two and a half going on three years, in order to cover the costs of

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262 BOA, MF.MKT 681.39, Aleppo governor to the Education Ministry, 28 Teşrinievvel 1318 [10 November 1902], Note from the ‘idadi schools administration, 12 Kanunuevvel 1318 [25 December 1902]; BOA, MF.MKT 677.57, Response dated 24 Kanunuevvel 1318 [6 January 1903] from the ‘idadi schools office to a telegram sent by the Aleppo education director’s deputy Mehmet to the Education Ministry, 14 Kanunuevvel 1318 [27 December 1902].

263 BOA, MF.MKT 677.57, Aleppo education director’s deputy Mehmet to the Education Ministry, 14 Kanunuevvel 1318 [27 December 1902]. According to Mehmet, “here there is not found a teacher from the masters of expertise” (buraca erbab-i ihtisasdan muallim bulunmadığından); BOA, MF.MKT 683.3, Note from ‘idadi schools’ administration, 16 Kanunusani [29 January 1903].

264 BOA, MF.MKT 683.3, Note from ‘idadi schools’ administration, 16 Kanunusani [29 January 1903]. Since Hamdi Efendi had started the program in the fall of 1900, the 1902-3 school year was the first time the third year would have been offered.

265 BOA, MF.MKT 721.17, Ahmet Hamdi Efendi to the Education Ministry, 28 Mart 1319 [10 April 1903]. Although Ahmet Hamdi studied at the Salonika agricultural school, his Ottoman grammar suggests that he was not a native Turkish speaker.
traveling between the model field and the school, which was located some distance from the city center. He was particularly incensed that the new teachers were likely to be appointed at the third rank with corresponding salaries when, as of 3 February 1903, his own salary for teaching during the current semester had not been confirmed. Despite his protests, two graduates of the Halkali Agricultural School, Abdussettar Efendi and Nureddin Efendi, were in due course appointed to teach the entire course load of 43 hours at a salary of 780 gurush each. Unlike Hamdi Efendi, these two men made it clear they would not work without pay, prompting the Aleppo education director to assert, when it seemed likely that their salaries would be delayed for two months, that he would pay them out of necessity from the education fund (maarif sandığı) to ensure continuity in agricultural lessons.

For the education ministry, these two men’s institutionally legitimated expertise clearly trumped the local, hands-on experience that the existing group of teachers as the assistant director of the province’s model field or the province’s veterinary inspector might have

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266 BOA, MF.MKT 721.17, Ahmet Hamdi Efendi to the Education Ministry, 28 Mart 1319 [10 April 1903]; BOA, MF.MKT 709.53, Ahmet Hamdi to the Aleppo Education Directorship, 13 Mart 1319 [26 Mart 1903]. On the distance of the school from the city center see BOA, MF.MKT 694.33, Aleppo Education Director to the Education Ministry, 11 Şubat 1318 [24 February 1903].

267 BOA, MF.MKT 709.53, Ahmet Hamdi to the Aleppo Education Directorship, 13 Mart 1319 [26 March 1903]. Quaert notes that Halkali graduates started at the fourth bureaucratic rank and could move up to the first. Bursa graduates started at the fifth and could not be promoted beyond the third rank. It seems likely that the same was also true for Selanik graduates (Quaert, “Ottoman Reform and Agriculture”, 103). Although his earlier petition indicates that he had not been invited to teach during the first two months of the 1902-3 school year, this petition suggests that he was teaching again by the winter semester.

268 Hamdi Efendi had been promised a 200 gurush monthly salary (BOA, MF.MKT 721.17, Ahmet Hamdi Efendi to the Education Ministry, 28 Mart 1319 [10 April 1903]). The courses to be taught as part of the program were mevalid-i selase (which apparently referred to minerals, strata of the earth, plants and animals), agricultural operations, agricultural methods notebook, agricultural geography, practical agricultural geometry, application to agriculture of science and chemistry and science (‘ilm) of weather conditions, agricultural animals, agricultural plants, agricultural lessons, agricultural machines, industrial agriculture, science (fenn) of [illegible], and the knowledge (‘ilm) of abundance’s application to agriculture (BOA, MF.MKT 683.3, see enclosed chart from the Education Ministry, n.d.). On the specifics of mevalid-i selase see Fakhri al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, (Damascus: Wazara al-Thaqafa, 1999), 44.

269 BOA, MF.MKT 692.13, Aleppo Education Director to the Education Ministry, 17 Şubat 1318 [2 March 1903]. Hamdi died soon after these events from cholera, but his children would petition to have his salary of 280 gurush/month transferred to them (BOA, MF.MKT 1002.43, Aleppo education director to the Ministry of Education, 28 Nisan 1323 [11 May 1907]). See also BOA, BEO 2774.208050, Financial Minister, 4 Şubat 1321 [17 February 1906]; BEO 2617.196237; BEO 2766.207398.
To demonstrate his achievement within these circles of expertise, Abdussettar even submitted his records from the Beirut ‘idadi school where he had excelled in agriculture, jurisprudence (fiqh), the knowledge of morals (‘ilm al-ahlaq), and trigonometry among other subjects. He also included his 1902 diploma from the Halkahi Ziraat Mektebi where he would have taken classes from the networks of teachers who had trained in foreign agricultural schools or been trained by those who had studied abroad. Official insistence on providing diplomas for the first crop of graduates from the three-year program at the Aleppo ‘idadi school further underscored the changing ways in which the central ministry sought to certify and institutionalize the acquisition of agricultural knowledge. Despite the enthusiasm for these developments, there seem to have been issues finding adequate funding for continuing these programs. In the fall of 1904, Abdussettar complained about the failure to extend his post for a year. Despite directives from the center clearly supportive of these institutions, in Aleppo the implementation of these programs often seems to have depended on local initiative and resources.

In the province of Syria, efforts were also underway to incorporate agriculture classes into the local school curriculum of both elite schools in city centers as well as village schools. In 1894, the governor of Syria wrote to Istanbul to urge the formation of agriculture, commerce, and industrial preparatory schools in the province in order to make local goods more competitive with foreign ones in the export market. A statement from the Great Education Council (meclis-

270 BOA, MF.MKT 694.33.
271 BOA, MF.MKT 694.33. His records specify that he was one-eyed. See copy of birth certificate copied on the same page as his diploma in the file.
272 BOA, MF.MKT 736.57, Aleppo education director to the Education Ministry, 30 Haziran 1319 [13 July 1903].
273 BOA, MF.MKT 810.43, Abdulsettar to the Education Ministry, 12 Eylül 1320 [25 September 1904].
274 BOA, BEO 553.41443, Governor of Syria to the Sublime Porte, 7 Kanunuevvel 1310 [19 December 1894].
 Maarif-i kebir) reaffirmed his demands. The Syria Education Director also added his support to the effort to incorporate adequate agricultural classes into the curriculum, stressing the fertility of the region and the engagement of a large proportion of the population in agriculture-related work. Noting that students who did not go into government posts or military schools from the local preparatory schools were most likely going to work in agriculture, he suggested that their agricultural training should be adequate for those among them who might seek entrance into the Halkalı Ziraat School in Istanbul. Government ministers clearly considered agriculture among the subjects suitable to an institutionalized system that certified the achievement of adequate scientific knowledge acquired from books and calibrated to ensure access to future levels in the educational hierarchy. A 1907-1908 academic year report card from the Idlib ruşdiye village school in Aleppo province would exemplify this shift, designating the agriculture course for the second and third year students as “Agricultural information from a book” (malumat zira’iye kitabından).

Despite a rhetoric that emphasized making these classes available to those who would be involved in agricultural work, the definition of “agricultural work” was apparently quite broad (or perhaps narrow) as some of the initial schools targeted for inclusion of these classes, being among the most elite in the region, were more likely to produce landlords than farmers. In 1902, a reorganization of classroom instruction for the preparatory schools in Hama and Damascus called for the inclusion of a class entitled “Agricultural and Health Information,” which would replace the “Maintaining Health” class in the old system. Initially envisioned as a class to be

275 BOA, BEO 553.41443, Statement signed by thirteen members of the Council, 19 Kanunusani 1310 [31 January 1895].
276 BOA, MF.MKT 248.52, Syrian Education Minister to the Education Ministry, 4 Şubat 1310 [16 February 1895].
277 BOA, MF.MKT 248.52, Syrian Education Minister to the Education Ministry, 4 Şubat 1310 [16 February 1895].
278 BOA, MF.İBT 211.34, Chart of grades for the 1907-1908 school year.
279 BOA, MF.MKT 697.29, see chart dated 15 Teşrinievvel 1318 [28 October 1902].
taught by the headmaster of each school, it was eventually suggested that an agricultural school graduate employed by the province of Syria should be hired to teach the class in the Damascus school, a school better known as Maktab ‘Anbar and renowned for its elite graduates many of whom would go on to occupy positions in the local government and eventually the mandate administration.\textsuperscript{280} The local agriculture inspector Melkon Efendi was chosen, although a delay in his confirmation meant that the local director of education was not able to pay his salary, set at 200 gurush for six hours, in full.\textsuperscript{281} Furthermore his responsibilities as the provincial agricultural inspector, which involved working in the garden of the hospital and the local model field, especially during the winter and spring, also meant that he was unavailable to teach in 1904. However, Syria’s director of education considered his expertise in the subject so irreplaceable by that he petitioned the education ministry to have Melkon’s appointment reconfirmed for the fall of 1904.\textsuperscript{282} To further support these efforts to incorporate agricultural lessons as well as commerce and industry classes, in August 1904 an imperial order allotted 55,724 gurush (and some centimes) to build seven classrooms, one model salon, and a shed as an extension of the Maktab ‘Anbar complex.\textsuperscript{283} While these ambitious plans were cancelled for unclear reasons,

\textsuperscript{280} BOA, MF.MKT 697.29, see chart dated 15 Teşrinievel 1318 [28 October 1902] and draft addressed to the Province of Syria Education Directorship dated 24 Mayıs? 1319 [6 June?] 1903. A petition from Kerek requested a graduate of the agricultural school to teach classes in that region as well, citing the tax revenues of Karak, Tafila, and Ma’an to justify the added expense (BOA, DH.MKT 2310.84, draft addressed to the Education Ministry and the Forest, Minerals, and Agriculture Ministry, 25 Şevval 1317 [26 February 1900]). On Maktab ‘Anbar see Eugene L. Rogan, “The Political Significance of an Ottoman Education: Maktab ‘Anbar revisited,” in \textit{From the Syrian Land to the States of Syrian and Lebanon}, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2004), 77-94 and Randi Deguilhem, “State Civil Education in Late Ottoman Damascus: A Unifying or a Separating Force?,” in \textit{The Syrian land : processes of integration and fragmentation : Bilād al-Shām from the 18th to the 20th century}, eds. Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäbler (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1998), 221-250. It has also been the subject of a number of memoirs. See for example Zafir Qasimi, \textit{Maktab ‘Anbar: ḥāwar wa-dhikrayāt mīn ḥayātīnā al-thaqāfīyyah wa-al-siyāsīyyah wa-al-iṭtimā‘īyyah} (Bayrut: Dar al-Mashriq, 1964).

\textsuperscript{281} It is unclear whether this Melkon is connected to the Melkon mentioned above who was the director of the Aleppo model field. BOA, MF.MKT 697.29, Syria Education Director to Education Ministry, 1 Teşrinievel 1319 [14 October 1903]. Melkon was apparently threatening to resign if he was not paid in full. BOA, MF.MKT 823.58, Syria Vali Nazim to the Education Ministry, 9 Eylül 1320 [22 September 1904].

\textsuperscript{282} BOA, MF.MKT 814.78, Syria Education Director to Ministry of Education, 24 Haziran 1320 [6 July 1904]

\textsuperscript{283} BOA, MF.MKT 636.49, the imperial order is dated 24 Temmuz 1320 [6 August 1904]. See the attached blueprint for a map of the proposed additions. A sum was also allotted around the same time for agriculture, industry, and
offering agricultural classes continued to be a priority even if a thinly stretched group of government employees who had acquired the expertise considered requisite to teaching them constrained their availability.\textsuperscript{284}

Enthusiasm over these new methods and technologies seems to have encouraged a number of elite students exposed to the agricultural basics at the preparatory level to seek higher education opportunities elsewhere. Sometimes this could be within the Ottoman domains at Halkali, Bursa, or Salonika, but often, if students had the requisite resources, they sought further education abroad. Fakhri al-Barudi, who was from a landowning Damascene family and would become a prominent nationalist leader during the years of the French mandate, was among those who attempted to enroll in a French agricultural school—a quest which he narrated at length in his memoirs.\textsuperscript{285} While he was ultimately unsuccessful, his narrative provides insight into his interest in the schools, the networks of Ottoman students from Bilad al-Sham who were in the process of attending them, and the importance of certified expertise to entering the system. Al-Barudi, having studied agricultural methods at Maktab ‘Anbar, which he attended from 1902-1908, traveled to France after the completion of his studies with the intent of studying agriculture.\textsuperscript{286} In March 1911, upon arriving in Montpellier, where one of the most prestigious French agricultural schools was located, he was met by Subhi Bey al-Hasibi, a Damascene who

\textsuperscript{284} BOA, MF.MKT 636.49, Draft on stationary of Education Ministry addressed to the Syria Education Directorship, 11 Eylül 1320 [24 September 1904]. While it is not clear who cancelled the plans, increasing agricultural and industrial classes in educational institutions was an empire wide policy that received additional support from reforms enacted in 1904 (Selçuk Akşan Somel, The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire 1839-1908: Islamization, Autocracy, and Discipline (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 178-9, 183-4). The logic was that by including more courses related to agriculture, commerce, and industry in the schools, students would be more encouraged to pursue the work in these areas after graduation, instead of just seeking positions in the civil service (Somel, Modernization, 179).

\textsuperscript{285} Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, 274-5.

\textsuperscript{286} al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat, 7, 44.
was already studying in the Montpellier agricultural school. On the third day after his arrival he spoke with the school’s director who told him he would need to improve his French before he enrolled and suggested he consider applying to the École Ferme in Lyon. Al-Barudi dutifully headed to Lyon where he observed the school, which he described as “an intermediate school teaching students practical agriculture with a simple element of theoretical sciences,” but encountered difficulties in enrolling because his Maktab ‘Anbar diploma was not translated into French. Unable to have his diploma properly translated and certified in Lyon, he contacted Ahmad Qadari, a fellow Damascene living in Paris, to see if he could do it. Qadari in turn invited al-Barudi to Paris, suggesting that he could enroll in the Grignon agricultural school, which had a similar farm school program.

Al-Barudi set off for Paris, but stopped along the way in Chalon-sur-Saône where he met up with three members of the first Syrian delegation of students—al-Amir Mustafa al-Shihabi, Izzeldin ‘Ilm al-Din, and ‘Abd al-Ghani al-Shabandar--chosen by a Damascene committee and sent to France in 1910 to pursue higher education. Two out of the three—al-Shihabi and ‘Ilm al-Din--were to study agriculture. After a year in Chalon-sur-Saône, where there was a Practical School of Agriculture and Vine-Growing, Al-Shihabi would take up his studies at the Grignon agricultural school and both he and al-Hasibi would go on to become agricultural engineers (muhandis zira’i), holding key positions overseeing state lands and agricultural policy in Syria during the mandate period. Upon his arrival in Paris, al-Barudi did try to enter the Grignon

287 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 175.
288 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 176.
289 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 172.
290 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 172-3.
291 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 191.
292 al-Barudi, Mudhakkirat al-Barudi, 192; Adnan al-Khatib, al-Amir Mustafa al-Shihabi, 1893-1968, (Dimashq: Matbu‘at Majma’ al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah, 1968), 11, 12; George Faris, Min Howa fi Suriya 1949, (Damascus: al-Matb’a al-Ahaliya, 1950), 113. It is unclear if al-Shihabi studied at the agricultural school in Chalon-sur-Saône, which al-Barudi discusses in his memoirs. Al-Shihabi’s biographer indicates that after one year in Chalon-sur-Saône

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agricultural school, but concerns over how he would fund his studies, eventually led him to abandon his project and return to Damascus after a bit of sightseeing.\textsuperscript{293} Although Barudi was not successful in his pursuit of agricultural education, his thorough descriptions of the agricultural schools he visited and agriculture’s prominence among the subjects studied by his colleagues, especially those sent as part of the Damascus student delegation, is indicative of the priority its study held in elite circles. His account also underlines the privileging of certified, institutionally-acquired expertise.

Meanwhile in the eastern Mediterranean, such interest fueled the organization of local exhibitions to display and demonstrate new tools to local farmers outside of the model farm and field system instituted by the state. Examples of European-made threshing, reaping, and agriculture (\textit{ziraat ve felahat}) instruments compatible with new methods were shown together with local agricultural implements.\textsuperscript{294} As might be expected in an ecologically diverse and, in some localities, quite fragile region where many farmed at subsistence-level, farmers approached these new machines with skepticism and demanded sufficient demonstration to prove that using them would not damage their expected yields. P.J. Louisides writing in the \textit{Levant Trade Review} urged the American Chamber of Commerce to establish a permanent exhibition of American-made implements and machinery, noting that this would “enable agriculturalists to decide for themselves, by actual trial, which machines and implements are best suited to their requirements.”\textsuperscript{295} Acknowledging the importance of taking into consideration local knowledge in pursuing such an enterprise, he added that “European agents and travelers”—who he claims

\textsuperscript{293} al-Barudi, \textit{Mudhakkirat al-Barudi}, 193. Apparently he got word in Paris that his father was not going to send him “one gurush.”

\textsuperscript{294} BOA, BEO 2106.157904, Draft prepared for the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry concerning the province of Syria, 12 Haziran 1319 [25 June 1903].

\textsuperscript{295} P.J. Louisides, “Commercial Letter from Cyprus,” \textit{Levant Trade Review} 1, no. 2 (November 1911), 228.
are “well acquainted with the tastes and wants of the farmers”—“may be found purchasing implements manufactured locally in a primitive way which they send home to imitate and improve.”

In 1911, the Agricultural Bank in Aleppo organized a demonstration for local farmers of “several mowers, drills, ploughs, harrows, etc.,” and in October 1911, “a small steam power threshing machine (of English make) with view [sic] of introducing them to the farmers.”

In Beirut, the offices of the journal *al-Iqitsad*, an enthusiastic advocate for agricultural “progress,” moved their administration to a space near the Ottoman post office where they explained people could view agriculture implements from the most famous English and American makes.

By 1908, in the days leading up to the second constitutional period, efforts were also underway to revive the project of establishing a model field in Syria. Previous plans for a field in the province had run into a number of challenges that delayed its implementation for almost a decade after these imperial visions were elaborated. The 70 “old dönüms” of land secured for a

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296 Louisides, “Commercial Letter,” 228. Interestingly, according to his assessment, the Germans have the most favorable banking terms in the region as they “allow[…] six to nine months credits without charging any interests with the exception of a few lines.” He also notes that no American banks are represented in the region and that the British have had to change their methods to stay competitive (226).

297 Lorenzo Y. Manachy, “Report from Aleppo,” *Levant Trade Review*, 1, no. 3, 5 (December 1911), 292. It seems very likely that this exhibition coincided with the governorship in Aleppo of Hüseyin Kazım, a fervent advocate of scientific agriculture who will be discussed in further detail below. The author of the article urges American manufacturers to take greater interest in this market, suggesting that once another brand becomes popular with the local population, other companies will have more trouble getting theirs accepted. According to one estimate, as of 30 June 1911 Great Britain, Germany, and Belgium were the chief exporters of machinery to the Ottoman Empire with the United States providing $133,639 worth of trade composed primarily of “reapers, steam plows, and threshing machines” (“Share of United States in the Machinery and Ironware Trade,” *Levant Trade Review*, 2, no. 3 (December 1912), 232). While it is unclear what percentage of this pertains to machinery sold in the Levant, there were clearly some machines in use in the region. Another page from the same issue contains a photo captioned “An American Threshing Machine at Work in Syria” (212).

298 *Al-Iqitsad*, issue 7, 193. Unfortunately only the first issue of those preserved still contains the date, 15 October 1910. Since the journal indicates that it was supposed to be published twice a month, issue 7 probably appeared sometime early in 1911. The journal contained a number of articles comparing agricultural developments in Europe and the United States with those in the Ottoman Empire. It also offered local farmers advice on the best way to pursue agricultural improvements in the Ottoman Empire in articles with titles like “Agriculture, Agriculture—O Syrians—'Teach, for teaching benefits’,” 129; “The Agricultural Plan,” 167; “The Future of Wheat,” 175; and “How to advance Syrian Agriculture—'We are in a valley and scientific agriculture is in a Valley’,” 289. This last phrase is a common expression in Arabic to express a vast difference between two opinions, ideas, etc.
model field and tree nursery in the province were deemed unsuitable due to their being located one hour’s distance from Damascus, containing rocky soil of second-degree fertility and lacking plentiful irrigation.  

Eight to nine years after its acquisition, the field lay abandoned with only a number of poplar trees planted around its edges. This time the Interior Ministry wrote to the Forest, Mines and Agriculture Ministry to suggest that a site in the Ghouta, the fertile oasis that surrounds the city, was ideal for the operation if more land could be acquired, a process that involved either gaining the consent of local landowners or purchasing land through an operation in accordance with eminent domain law (istimlak kanunu). The primary considerations in determining an appropriate spot were its first-degree fertility, access to irrigation, and its being surrounded by farms, village lands, and built-up areas. This proximity to the local agricultural population would thus facilitate their access to the model farm’s activities, including demonstrations of new equipment and associated methods. The request for the appropriations necessary to establish such a field used arguments based on ensuring general (public) benefits (istifade-i umumiye) to establish why the old site, which in addition to its less than desirable soil and irrigation situation was located some one hour’s distance from the city, did not fulfill the requirements of an exemplary model field. It further urged Syria’s even greater need (as compared to other provinces that already had such institutions) for such a project of public utility

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299 BOA, DH.MKT 2721.3, Suriya Valisi namına Bende İbrahim Şükrü bin Süleyman, 16 Kanunuevvel 1324 [29 December 1908]. The unit referred to in the document is “atik dönüm” which was used to refer to an older dönüm measure.

300 BOA, DH.MKT 2721.3, Suriye Valisi namına Bende İbrahim Şükrü bin Süleyman, 16 Kanunuevvel 1324 [29 December 1908].

301 BOA, DH.MKT 1258.14. Draft to the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry dated 15/19 Mayis 1324 [28 May 1908/1 June 1908] The Ghouta was its own nahiye, a small Ottoman administrative unit, perhaps best translated as district.
(mü‘essesat naфиaya) in order to ensure the local population benefitted from progress in scientific agriculture.\textsuperscript{302}

Following the coming of the Committee of Union and Progress to power, the governor’s representative wrote to the Interior Ministry to urge action again on the project.\textsuperscript{303} Citing the old tools and ancient methods (\textit{alat ve edevat-ı kadime ile tarz-ı atikde filahat ve hıraset eylemler\i}) of the local population, but also their capacity and predisposition (\textit{kabiliyet ve isti‘dadlari}) for agriculture and therefore the benefits they (and the treasury) would gain from their becoming knowledgeable of new scientific rules and methods, the governor’s office wrote to urge the Ministry to establish a complete and regular (\textit{mükemmel ve muntazam}) model field, as opposed to just a model nursery, in the center of the province.\textsuperscript{304} It also suggested the establishment of an agricultural school either within the field or nearby to ensure both practical and theoretical applications.\textsuperscript{305} The author suggested that the funds should come from the 372,715 gurush that represented two-thirds of the 1323 (March 1907-February 1908) fiscal year dividends (\textit{temettü hissesi}) held by the agricultural bank.\textsuperscript{306}

By June 1909, plans were clearly underway to establish a theoretical and practical agriculture school as well as a Chambers of Agriculture in the province of Syria. Since the current year’s budget did not contain appropriations for such a school, the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister urged the Interior Ministry to take it into careful consideration in the

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\textsuperscript{302} BOA, DH.MKT 1258.14. Draft to the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry dated 15/19 May\i 1324 [28 May 1908/1 June 1908].
\textsuperscript{303} BOA, DH.MKT 2721.3, Suriye Valisi namına Bende İbrahim Şüküri bin Süleyman to the Interior Ministry, 16 Kanunuevel 1324 [29 December 1908].
\textsuperscript{304} The letter indicates that there was a petition to turn the old field into just a model nursery, although there had still been no answer regarding this request.
\textsuperscript{305} BOA, DH.MKT 2721.3, Suriye Valisi namına Bende İbrahim Şüküri bin Süleyman to the Interior Ministry, 16 Kanunuevel 1324 [29 December 1908].
\textsuperscript{306} BOA, DH.MKT 2721.3, Suriye Valisi namına Bende İbrahim Şüküri bin Süleyman to the Interior Ministry, 16 Kanunuevel 1324 [29 December 1908].
coming year’s budget. Although the document does not explicitly state where this agriculture school was to be established, within a year the building of an agricultural school in the province of Syria was underway in the town of Selemiye about 200 kilometers northeast of Damascus and just southeast of Hama. While this does not seem to have been the originally intended location for the school, the focus on its construction in the agricultural inspector’s 1910 report for Syria, which was filed alongside a collection of empire-wide agricultural reports, suggests this is where the plan came to fruition.

Selemiye, while not nearly as lush as the Ghouta of Damascus, was nonetheless a promising site for an agricultural school, especially if growing wheat and barley by dry-farming techniques was a primary goal. Recently resettled by Ismaili communities in the mid-19th century, the town sat in a plain of fertile land surrounded by ancient irrigation systems and received just under 350 mm (13.8 inches) of rainfall annually. These irrigation systems were primarily composed of artificial underground water tunnels, or foqqaras, that due to lack of permanent settlement in the region for several centuries had fallen into disrepair. However, those resettling the region chose it precisely because with a bit of repair work and regular maintenance, the existing foqqaras could provide decent irrigation for grain-growing purposes. If additional irrigation sources could be secured, it even had the potential to be a

307 BOA, DH.MKT 2832.89, Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister to the Interior Ministry, 19 Mayıs 1325 [1 June 1909].
308 The Selemiye agricultural school still exists in Selemiye today as an agricultural college (kulliye ziraite).
309 BOA, DH. İD 99.32, Report from the agricultural inspector for Beirut, Syria, and Aleppo provinces, 26 Teşrinievvel 1326 [8 November 1910].
311 Lewis, “Malaria,” 284-5. Lewis traces the canals’ construction back to the Roman and pre-Ottoman period, citing an inscription from as late as March 1496 on a mosque in Hama which indicates that a major foqqa that brought water from Selemiye to Hama (apparently the clear water of Selemiye was considered superior to the more murky waters of the Oronetes river that runs through Hama) had a specially designated fund from which no money was allowed to be diverted (285). With the extension of the Ottoman Empire into the region in 1516 settlement tended to recede westward (285).
312 Lewis, Nomads and Settlers, 62; Lewis, “Malaria,” 286.
promising environment for cotton as well—a crop whose increased cultivation in the region
Ottoman officials were eager to promote.313 Thus, albeit not the Ghouta of Damascus, Selemiye
had potential as a site for an agricultural school, especially for officials eager to experiment with
new methods in drier climates.314

But the establishment of the Selemiye agricultural school was fraught with tension.
According to the agricultural inspector, it pitted the local mutassarif, Nazim Bey, who was intent
on “diffusing education and expanding and improving agriculture” (maarifin ta’mimi ve ziraatın
eslah ve tevsî’i) against the “intentions of devilishness” (niyyet-i ibliskaraneler) of the “corrupt
works of the usurpers and enemies of progress” (müteğalibanın ve terakki düşmanlarının eser-i
ıfsadi) who perpetually sought to thwart his efforts.315 In language that grew increasingly
exasperated, the inspector explained how, in early May, after returning from a 22 day trip to deal
with locusts in Urfa 300 kilometers to the northeast, he finished compiling the estimation report
for the job of building the agricultural school and circulated it in Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus and
Hama for bids. With no bids by June 7th he extended the period to July 3rd during which time he
received bids from Hama and Beirut and decided to proceed with the architect from Beirut,
Nafliyen Kaspar Bey. He noted that the people of Selemiye had promised to provide a certain
quantity of the building materials—namely stone, lime and gravel, the costs for which had not
been included in the bid-upon estimation. At the point when the builders needed these materials
to continue, they were withheld causing the builders to return to Beirut since they could not

313 Lewis, “Malaria,” 286. Lewis notes that commercial cotton cultivation supported by government grants was well
underway in 1949. BOA, T.ZTı 3047.40, Forest, Mines and Agriculture Ministry to the Aleppo Model Field
Director’s representative, 19 Nisan 1323 [2 May 1907]; BOA, T.ZTİ 3047.44, Forest, Mines and Agriculture
Ministry to the Province of Syria’s Agriculture Inspectorship, 19 Nisan 1323 [2 May 1907].
314 DH.ID 26-1.81, Undersecretary in the name of the foreign ministry to the Interior Ministry, 22 Haziran 1327 [5
July 1911] details plans to send students from Trablus Garb to a French agricultural school in Tunis to study
agriculture of hot lands (bilad hara).
315 BOA, DH. İD 99.32. Report from the agricultural inspector for Beirut, Syria, and Aleppo provinces, 26
Teşrinievvvel 1326 [8 November 1910].
proceed with the work. Nazim Bey meanwhile could not deal with the situation because he was occupied with a mob that attacked the government’s district office and plundered the seed storehouses in the market.\textsuperscript{316} Given the urgency to complete the school in order to start classes in the fall, the inspector and Nazim Bey set off for Damascus to consult with the province and Hicaz railroad’s head engineers in order to add the lacking materials into the existing contract. After some back and forth over the proposal between the governor of Syria and the local administrative council they finally arrived at an agreement and the contractor and his men with wagons of supplies set out again for Selemiye only to have Nazim Bey derailed by a competing proposal from the town purporting to be able to do the job for even less. Kaspar Efendi and his men returned to Beirut, while the wagons of supplies were sent to Aleppo. The offer did not turn out to be serious; however, it delayed the project yet again. While the reasons behind this resistance to the school’s establishment were complex and seem to have consisted of multiple grievances,\textsuperscript{317} the fact that the school’s establishment provoked such a reaction created an administrative paper trail that demonstrates how an institution dedicated to the dissemination of scientific agricultural knowledge impacted or was perceived to impact the different members of this rural community.

Despite the agricultural inspector’s exasperation and rather dismissive attitude towards this resistance to the agricultural school, these claims were taken seriously enough by other branches of the Ottoman bureaucracy to precipitate an inquiry into the complaints. The responses of various actors within the community--from government bureaucrats, to local leaders, to a landless sharecropper—preserved in the transcript of the enquiry (\textit{istintaqname}) provide insight

\textsuperscript{316} BOA, DH,ID 99.32. Report from the agricultural inspector for Beirut, Syria, and Aleppo provinces, 26 Teşrinievel 1326 [8 November 1910]. BOA, ŞD 2310.17 contains exhaustive details about these events.

into the interests it served on a practical level that contrasted with the discursive claims about its
general utility. Despite such justifications, the institutionalization of knowledge transmission
concerning agriculture was perceived as an uneven process with uneven impacts. While it is
unclear whether some of the funding for the school came from the dividends of the agricultural
bank as had been suggested, at least a portion of the funding came from about 10,000 lira (9,000
in cash and 1,000 in jewelry) that the mutassarif of Hama and the ka'immaqam of Selemiye had
confiscated from Ismaili communities in the region. The money had originally been collected as
zakat to be sent to the Ağa Khan, who was based in British-colonized Bombay and who the
Ismailis had recognized as their spiritual head, but it was not allowed to leave the Ottoman
domains. Since the government claimed it was unable to return the money because the
amounts given by individuals had not been carefully recorded, local officials and some members
of the community decided that it should be donated to support the establishment of an
agricultural school. Other members of the community did not agree. The dissension in the
community reached such a pitch that an official from the civil inspector’s office was sent to
make an inquiry and report back.

Examining the transcript of the proceedings reveals a clear divide between who was
willing to contribute their confiscated funds to the school and who was not. While there were
certainly a number of local landowners who were content to donate their funds—at one point the
investigator insisted to an unhappy witness that according to his information a large number of

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318 Douwes and Lewis, “The Trials,” 215, 228. Initially, it appears that the funds were slated for five elementary
schools, but at some point some portion of them became integral to the process of funding the agricultural school
(BOA, BEO 3352.251358, Governor of Syria to Interior Ministry, 26 Mayis 1324 [8 June 1908]). This document
does not trace this transition but discusses the initial plan to use them for elementary schools. One interviewee
speculated that at least 9000 people had contributed to the sum (BOA, BEO 3884.291293, testimony of Ahmet bin
Mahfuz al-Haj, p. 4, n.d. [Although given the dates of other papers in the file it is probably from the spring of
1911.]).

319 BOA, BEO 3884.291293, Letter to Interior Ministry, 29(?) Mart 1327 [11(?) April 1911].

320 The transcript is a fascinating document as the interviews take place in both Arabic and Turkish with questions
sometimes being asked in one language and answered in the other (See BOA, BEO 3884.291293).
people were in favor of spending money on the school—clearly a number of poorer residents of the Selemiye region did not consider that the school would benefit them and thus did not want their money being used for this purpose. On the contrary, there was the clear perception that any resources acquired by the school would only benefit large landowners. A number of witnesses, among them eighteen-year-old Muhammad bin Ali who identified himself as not having any lands to work without rent and Muhammad bin Ahmet who introduced himself as working in agriculture (ziraat ve felahat) and running a small shop, refused categorically (kati’an) to consent to their money being used for an agricultural school. According to the mukhtar of the east and west neighborhoods (mahale) there were about 100 people out of 2,000 men and women who supported the use of their donated money for the school. He clarified that these were the owners of land and wealth and that those who opposed the school tended to be tenant farmers (serseriye), lacking in land, property and work. Two other mukhtars also bore witness that in the regions under their authority similar objections applied—in the Qabile neighborhood 200 out of 4,000 people wanted to contribute, while in the east neighborhood some 100 out of 2,000 were willing. Those that were willing were once again identified as the “owners of wealth and property.” Despite such recognition of the economic differential at work, one mukhtar nonetheless referred to those who desired to donate their money to the school as the “enlightened ones.”

323 BOA, BEO 3884.291293, testimony of the mukhtar of the eastern and northern neighborhoods, Hüseyin ‘Ali Mahfuz, p. 9, n.d.
324 BOA, BEO 3884.291293, testimony of the mukhtar of the Qabile neighborhood, p. 11, n.d.; testimony of the mukhtar of the Gharbiye neighborhood, p. 12, n.d.
325 BOA, BEO 3884.291293, testimony of the mukhtar of the Gharbiye neighborhood, p. 12, n.d.
326 BOA, BEO 3884.291293, testimony of the mukhtar of the eastern and northern neighborhoods, Hüseyin ‘Ali Mahfuz, p. 9, n.d.
from being relegated to the enemies of progress. The local civil inspector further affirmed this characterization when he wrote to the Interior Ministry that certain members of the local community wanted to ensure their children’s enlightenment and education by establishing this agricultural school despite the “pesterings” of some in the community who were against it.\textsuperscript{327}

Indeed from the perspective of local administrators, the school was to become the focus of their efforts to introduce “scientific agriculture” in the region. Even as the agriculture inspector relayed information about its contested origins in March 1911, instruction in the school was underway with eighteen students, and local landowners had shown their support by donating 374 dönüms of land for the school’s experimental field.\textsuperscript{328} The governor of Suriye also threw his weight behind the school because, he claimed, it demonstrated the value of scientific agriculture and “what that means” to the local community. Complaining that the agriculture officials appointed to the province were not effective, he insisted that agricultural resources were best spent on the Selemiye agricultural school and the province’s model farm.\textsuperscript{329} Certainly, the fertile soil and irrigation resources of the land around Selemiye made it a suitable region for agricultural experimentation, but it was also a prime location given its close proximity to the intersection of the provinces of Syria, Aleppo and Beirut, meaning that students from all of these provinces could be expected to attend. But these would not just be any students interested in learning about scientific agriculture. As demonstrated by the objections of local peasant farmers involved in the inquiry, despite official promises of the school’s enlightening role for all, popular opinion held that the school’s main beneficiaries would be limited. And indeed, despite claims

\textsuperscript{327} BOA, BEO 3884.291293.
\textsuperscript{328} BOA, BEO 3884.291293, List appended to end of inquiry dated 27 Şubat 1326 [12 March 1911]. In addition to discontent over the confiscated funds, there also appears to have been concerns regarding how the land for the school will be set aside and divided. See report of the province’s civil inspector’s assistant to the Interior Ministry, 13 Mart 1327 [26 March 1911].
\textsuperscript{329} BOA, DH.ID 99.32, Governor of Syria to the Interior Ministry, 9 Kanunusani 1327 [22 January 1912].
that touted scientific agriculture’s general benefits, reports on the school’s activities indicate that its resources were to be invested in those who themselves had the means to experiment further. Besides these new methods were often incompatible with existing landholding practices and their success was not guaranteed, underscoring why peasants living at subsistence level and with access to very few extra resources were justifiably skeptical about the benefits it would offer them.

An account of the school’s operations and initiatives clearly demonstrates its prerogatives, but also the challenges it faced. The director himself was none other than Abdussettar, a Beirut native and one of the Halkalı Agricultural School graduates appointed to replace Ahmet Hamdi in the Aleppo ‘idadi school. He had since become a teacher and assistant director at the Beirut ‘idadi school and was exemplary of the elite circles within which this scientific, book-derived agricultural knowledge now circulated. He was appointed director of the Selemiye school sometime in early November 1910.\textsuperscript{330} The scope of the school’s anticipated activities were wide-ranging and covered all aspects of “scientific agriculture” quite comprehensively.\textsuperscript{331}

By March 1912, the school was on the verge of demonstrating to villagers the application of new methods in the planting and harvesting of certain staple crops such as wheat, barley, Egyptian millet, cumin, and common vetch, which were currently planted in the region by biennial rotation—one year of fallow, one year sown. Meanwhile, the local mayor (belediye reisi) had successfully experimented with growing crops unfamiliar to the region, namely three varieties of Egyptian cotton and Marseille and Cyprus potatoes, in an irrigated field. The cotton yield was impressive--300 okka of cotton pods from one okka (2.83 lbs) of

\textsuperscript{330} Osmani Ziraat ve Ticaret Gazetesi, 1 Teşrinisani 1326 [14 November 1910], inside front cover; BOA, MF.MKT 694.33.

\textsuperscript{331} Activities mentioned in the report included artificial and natural pastures, bird raising, animal breeding, natural versus artificial fertilizers, orchard planting, dairying, bee-keeping, and silkworm raising.
cotton seeds. Only after his success did these crops become an attractive prospect for the school to try—given such auspicious results and these crops’ importance to commerce Abdussettar noted they would plant a larger quantity the following year. Furthermore, he determined the school itself should also undertake to plant crops new to the region, including sesame, Egyptian and Adana local cotton as well as melons. In making this distinction the director of the school does seem to have been intent on concentrating its resources on crops that were familiar to the local population, branching out only when the possibility of success with new crops had already been demonstrated.\footnote{BOA, T.TZİ 3056.62. Report signed by the agricultural school’s director, Abdussettar, and dated 23 Şubat 1327 [4 March 1912].}

In his discussion of the crops planted and methods used, Abdussettar’s meticulous report demonstrates not only the attempt to draw distinctions between “scientific” and existing means of agricultural production, but also the obstacles that hindered the production of this distinction as the school’s experiments faced challenges to new methods and implements from certain ecological and climatic conditions and limitations. He emphasized measuring, quantifying and controlling nature, describing his use of itsy bitsy (ufak tefek) instruments, since the astronomical observatory had not yet been built, to determine that temperatures had averaged between 13-14 degrees Celsius, rainfall was good and the weather in general moderate. But quantifying aspects of nature did not mean wresting it to one’s will. Lingering snow cover from a harsh winter led to disappointing wheat and barley yields, and what the current animal stock at the school could actually pull determined the machines that were feasible. One of the oxen had already died from a “pain in the bowels.” Furthermore, although it had rained during the usual season, the amount was not enough, which meant that the harvest had to be collected with “normal reaping” (‘adi orak). While new Wood and Deering reaping machines stood at the ready and, he noted, the
local community was eager to observe their good qualities (*bunun muhassenatını görmeye ahali şiddetle muntazardır*), the harvest-ready crops’ height of only 20 centimeters and their closeness rendered these machines impractical despite the school’s students’ and teacher’s readiness to use them.\(^{333}\)

Not only did environmental conditions and natural limits pose obstacles to implementing these “scientific” methods, but local agricultural practices also meant certain machines were unsuitable. As long as the land remained unpartitioned (*ifrazdan evvel*), a cause of some of the unrest according to the previously-discussed inquiry, only normal local plows (*'adi yerli kara sapanlar*) and a system of biennial rotation could be implemented. Only after partitioning could the initial plowing of fields to be prepared for seeding (*nadas usulii*) be undertaken which would allow for new implements and “agriculture that is given implementation circumscribed by science” (*fenn dairesinde icra ilınan felahat*).\(^{334}\) Furthermore, because of the “community’s practice of sowing the land in strips harvesting machines could not be used” (*ahalinin ziraati hatt usulunca ekildiğinden orak makineleri işledilememiştir*).\(^{335}\) Essential aspects of local practice prevented these new machines and practices from being applicable given the requirements of local conditions.

While the school’s capacity to demonstrate scientific agriculture to the local community at the level envisioned by Syria’s governor would clearly be an ongoing process, the human objects of the school’s educational program were from the start those envisioned by the locals who had demanded their money back. Abdussettar, in addition to discussing the progress of the

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\(^{333}\) BOA, T.TZİ 3056.62. Report signed by the agricultural school’s director, Abdussettar, 23 Şubat 1327 [4 March 1912].

\(^{334}\) “*Nadas usulii*” seems to be used by Abdussettar as a method in opposition to a one year fallow, one year plowing system.

\(^{335}\) BOA, T.TZİ 3056.62. Report signed by the agricultural school’s director, Abdussettar, 23 Şubat 1327 [4 March 1912].
schools’ various experiments and operations, explained in detail who should be considered
appropriate candidates for admission to the school. He stressed the need to improve the school’s
curriculum and the array of courses it offered, urging the appointment of two additional teachers,
in order to appeal to the children of local large landowners, noting that three-fourths of the land
in the provinces of Syria, Beirut and Aleppo was in the hands of “distinguished men”
(mütehâyyiz adamlar). Otherwise, he explained, these potential students would choose to go to
more established schools in Salonika and Istanbul. The school, he insisted, should not become a
dar-ul-aceze or almshouse for landless children whose lack of land would mean they could not
translate the school’s training into a more widespread practice of and experimentation with
scientific agriculture. Rather it should be a school catering to students whose families owned
large amounts of land where they could experiment with the techniques taught. In this context,
science was clearly considered to be a prerogative of the wealthy and landed, its universal
benefits not quite so universal.336 By 1917, the narrative of the school’s contentious beginnings
would be summed up by Hüseyin Kazım in his aforementioned report on agriculture for Behcet
and Tamimi as follows: “Immigrant villagers had the effect (i.e. benefit) of both an agricultural
school and an agriculture model field for Syria. In that place, climatic conditions, atmospheric
influences, the land’s composition were investigated at length and the project was relieved from
their concerns and their hesitations at its newness.”337 In his recounting of events, objections that
had stemmed from how the project was financed became merely objections to the unfamiliar.

As these projects gained more and more organized state support, local elites seized the
initiative to demand their piece of the scientific agricultural pie. In Zor, a largely desert region

336 BOA, T.TZİ 3056.62. Report signed by the agricultural school’s director, Abdussettar, 23 Şubat 1327 [4 March
1912].
337 Kazım, “A Few Words,” 61. Although Kazım does not specify that the school and model farm are those of
Selemiye, it seems the most likely candidate for these remarks, especially given his reference to local concerns.
located east of the province of Syria and crisscrossed by the Euphrates and its tributary the Khabur, the mutassarif and a number of other local officials asked the state to provide them with a model field or, if that was beyond its resources, at least a scientific employee to demonstrate how to use new equipment.\(^{338}\) They offered to donate a piece of land for the field of 4,700 dönüms and suggested the funds could be taken from the tithe amount. Claiming lack of experts (‘adem-i vukufları), but urging the tax value of the region if the benefits of the fertile land and irrigation from the Euphrates and the Khabur were realized, they explained how a group of four to five farmers were already gathering during two seasons to plant wheat, millet, and sesame with various implements.\(^ {339}\) The Council of State responded favorably to their request, but insisted it was inappropriate for the local community (ahali) to pay and maintained that the funds for the field and technical expert had to come from the agricultural ministry’s budget.\(^ {340}\) By August 1910, plans were underway to establish a model field in Zor and the Commerce and Agriculture Ministry were making arrangements to include funds for an implement depot, an iron foundry and useful seeds in the 1327 (1911) budget.\(^ {341}\) Meanwhile in Beirut, the members of the General Council were in the process of establishing the particulars of their contributions to and benefits, including tax exemptions on crops and trees planted, from a general night agricultural school, which along with mobile agricultural agents for each kaza was to be funded with capital from the agricultural bank.\(^ {342}\) The agriculture minister in responding to these particulars also

\(^{338}\) BOA, ŞD 2243.12, Zor mutassarif et al. to the Interior Ministry, 4 Şubat 1323 [17 February 1908].

\(^{339}\) BOA, ŞD 2243.12, Zor mutassarif et al. to the Interior Ministry, 4 Şubat 1323 [17 February 1908].

\(^{340}\) BOA, DH.MKT 1241.82, copy of the Council of State’s financial office’s minutes, 19 Nisan 1324 [2 May 1908].

\(^{341}\) BOA, DH.ID 99.32, Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry to the Interior Ministry, 18 Ağustos 1326 [31 August 1910].

\(^{342}\) BOA, ŞD 2307.7, Beirut general committee to the Interior Ministry, 9 Mart 1325 [22 March 1909].
indicated there would be funds in the following year’s budget for a special silk facility given the importance of this industry to the region.\textsuperscript{343}

In 1913 a call in a Beirut newspaper to establish a practical agricultural school in the Hawran followed these developments. Despite being a key breadbasket region, the Hawran had been excluded from central planning initiatives regarding agricultural education because of its special administrative status. Nonetheless the state had appointed two officials and had established an agricultural implements depot staffed with another employee who had been traveling the countryside for over a year and a half demonstrating the “progress of agriculture” to both the “local government and all classes of the community.” He had also apparently done his best to establish schools in Jebel al-Druze, Ajloun, and Hawran.\textsuperscript{344}

While agricultural education, whether in the form of model fields, classes, or schools, had experienced a rather bumpy start in the region, with the area of Aleppo clearly prioritized initially, by the years immediately preceding the First World War and following the CUP’s 1908 Revolution a not insignificant network of agricultural schools, model farms and fields existed in the region. Interested locals who wanted to learn more about new machinery could visit a number of depots established by the government or showrooms such as those advertised in \textit{al-Iqtsad}. It was a trend that would continue over the course of the war despite difficult circumstances. This process unfolded through a combination of supportive initiatives from the imperial center dating back to the latter half of the nineteenth century and local action undertaken by those engaged in them. Local actors had significant autonomy to experiment and develop these programs as they saw fit, but with an increasing number of educated agronomists emerging from the Halkalı Agricultural School, insistence on their having certified expertise

\textsuperscript{343} BOA, ŞD 2307.7, Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Minister to the Council of State, 22 Eylül 1325 [5 October 1909].

\textsuperscript{344} “The need of the Hawran for an Agricultural School,” \textit{Al-İttihad al-Osmani}, 29 April 1913.
intensified. Despite the rhetoric accompanying these efforts stressing the general benefits of these programs and a clear emphasis on investing resources in crops and projects that had the potential to be of broad utility, access to the accompanying technology and methods, and the knowledge necessary to implement them was highly uneven. Furthermore, local landholding arrangements and climatic conditions represented their own unique obstacles and often foiled attempts at experimentation. As Kazım would explain in his report for Behcet and Tamimi, social, economic, and ecological conditions posed systemic challenges to the spread of these new methods. Although ongoing experimentation promised to overcome the ecological obstacles, Kazım as the newly-appointed CUP governor to Aleppo in 1910, set out to tackle administratively the social and economic obstacles head-on, clearly hopeful that changed political circumstances would aid his cause. He was to be disappointed. It is to these challenges and Kazım’s response to them that the final section of this chapter will now turn.

Hüseyin Kazım and Agricultural Reform in Aleppo: The Travails of a CUP governor

Towards the end of January 1911 during the onset of the coldest winter in living memory in the Vilayet of Aleppo, Hüseyin Kazım compiled a report that he apparently hoped would spur the new Constitutional administration in Istanbul into action. Livid with what he portrayed as flagrant disregard for his authority as governor and upholder locally of the CUP ideals of freedom (hürriyet), equality (müsavat), and justice (adalet) or as he put it “the most comprehensive political and civil law in the world,” he demanded that the central government demonstrate that it could administratively enact what it claimed to ideologically represent. In particular, his outrage centered on the corrupt state of land registration practices in the province.

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345 BOA, DH.ID 44-2.3, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 15 Kanunusani 1326 [28 January 1911].
To demonstrate his claims Kazım wrote up a report detailing the nature of local abuses and enclosed copies of all the relevant original documents pertaining to several exemplary cases that, he insisted, showcased the tyranny of a small group of local elites. This collection of documents and the narrative from Kazım himself that accompanied them provide insight into not only how local peasants or small landowners conceived of the constitutional government and their ability to appeal to its representatives for justice, but also suggest how a technocratic-minded governor viewed the primary social and economic challenges to agricultural change as he found his efforts at reform checked by a constellation of power relations at the local level. In essence Kazım, despite posing himself as an intermediary based on purportedly special powers granted from the center, excellent connections, relevant technocratic expertise, and a professed passion and commitment to the ideals of the revolution found himself stymied by the structure of the local bureaucracy and internal networks of a small group of local influential elites.

As demonstrated by the discussion of his contribution to Vilayet Beirut at the beginning of this chapter, Hüseyin Kazım’s impact and influence as a technocrat concerned with agricultural reform would go far beyond his time as governor. Notably, as the one actor in this story who has been discussed in somewhat greater detail elsewhere, explanations of Kazım’s story have represented him as exemplary of Ottoman modernity and reform or as a rabble-rousing governor who confronted the “landlords” in Aleppo in a move “anticipating the Ba‘thist reformers of the 1950s.” But Kazım was not an isolated case. In fact, the policies of these “Ba‘thist reformers” could actually be seen as a culmination of proposals technocrats were gradually formulating and articulating from the late nineteenth century on in the Ottoman

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Empire, which increasingly emphasized the role of the state in matters of rural reform. In the Ottoman Empire, Kazım was a prominent participant in the resulting network of technocratic elites committed to implementing these changes and the second constitutional revolution in 1908 would bring many of these elites to powerful administrative positions.

Thus Kazım’s emphasis on land as the most contentious issue of the day reflected a common trend in the provinces of the Ottoman Empire following the institution of the second constitutional regime. Through the examination of petitions and other source materials, a number of scholars have begun to explore provincial responses to the institution of CUP rule. In each instance, land disputes overwhelmingly seem to compose the majority of the claims submitted. Over the course of the second half of the 19th century, in particular following the institution of the 1858 Land Code, land registration at least in certain areas of the empire “would gradually transform use rights on land into exclusionary land rights.” There seem to have been a number of processes and practices through which more powerful provincial officials were able to gain control of land, whether they seized it as payment for taxes or unpaid loans, through fraud, or other “tricks” to use Kazım’s word, although such was not always the case or necessarily the norm. Sometimes these means acquired legal status, sometimes they did not, but in Aleppo

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349 Klein, *Margins of Empire*, 147-149. For another perspective on the situation see Martha Mundy and Richard Saumarez Smith, *Governing Property, Making the Modern State: Law, Administration, and Production in Ottoman Syria* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007). While there were clearly flagrant abuses of power as the following section will demonstrate, without more research it is difficult to say to what extent these were representative. Mundy and Saumarez Smith’s work suggests that in parts of the province of Syria, property ownership continued to be divided and inherited in shares throughout the post land reform period. One of Kazım’s dispatches also suggests that fair division and registration of land followed the reform and that instances of fraud were endemic but exceptional (BOA, DH.ID 44-2.3, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 19 Mart 1327 [1 April 1911]).
villagers’ attempts to seek redress for their grievances seem to have been frustrated by local administrators and legal systems that favored certain local powerholders.\footnote{Nonetheless, it appears that at least in some areas, Bitlis province for example, “energetic” governors were able to obtain some relief for deprived villagers. See Klein, \textit{Margins of Empire}, 155. More work still needs to be done on this though.}

Tracing the trajectory of Kazım’s experience in Aleppo highlights the local tensions, provincial perceptions of the CUP, and configuration of power relations that characterized this region in the wake of the revolution. While the development and expansion of institutions dedicated to “scientific” agricultural expertise had proceeded apace, the social and economic obstacles to applying these new methods, at least according to technocratic logic, largely remained. The 1908 revolution seems to have spurred efforts aimed at addressing these obstacles by sending out officials, like Kazım, who were passionate to pursue these reforms and the larger role it would entail locally for the state. Kazım’s experience, however, demonstrates the limits imposed on the state’s ability to intervene as a result of local powerholders’ influence.

For Kazım, passionately defending villagers’ rights to their land and the accurate registration of land ownership and value was not merely about ensuring that local people were able to secure those rights. It was most fundamentally about ensuring greater control for the state over rural affairs—from land registration to tax collection—articulated through the prism of agricultural development. As we have seen, Kazım was a staunch supporter of this idea. Privileged and wealthy, he was born the son of the governor of Trabzon and pursued studies at the Soğukçeşme military school, Mülkiye Mektebi, and the English Commerce School in İzmir.\footnote{\textit{Türk Ansiklopedisi}, (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1943), 420.} According to the British consul, he had also studied agriculture at the École Agronomie de Paris.\footnote{UKNA, FO 195.2337, Fontana to Lowther, 15 November 1910.} Later having given up a plan to travel to New Zealand with his friend Tevfik Fikret, he decided to work on a small farm on land bought by his father in Manisa. According to his
memoirs, during this period he read about scientific and mechanical agriculture and “tested the most practically applicable theories and did not abstain from investigating the region’s agricultural qualities and conditions.”

Following the second constitutional revolution, he joined forces with Tevfik Fikret and Hüseyin Cahid to start the newspaper Tanin, securing for himself an influential mouthpiece in the post-1908 moment.

Following on the heels of an apparently productive stint as the mutessarif of Seres, Kazım arrived in Aleppo on a mission, considering the tenure of his time as governor even more temporary than most. He had come to Aleppo, so he informed the British consul, invested with “special powers,” in particular over the judiciary. Once he had used the “ax…to clear the way for his successor” he would leave. His influential position in the Istanbul affairs of the CUP was not lost on the British or French consuls, the latter of which noted that he was “an important figure and very well-liked of the Committee.”

His arrival followed the recall of the previous governor, Fakhri Pasha, over an affair of press freedoms, although dissatisfaction with Fakhri Pasha’s rule had run deeper. In the words of the French consul, “He was a débonnaire man with excellent intentions, but of a nature very easy to get around. He quickly became an instrument in the hand of the large landowners who, under a liberal etiquette, continue to use the worst processes from the past.” The target of Kazım’s reforming zeal confirmed the import of

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353 Hüseyin Kazım Kadri, Meşrutiyetten Cumhuriyete Hatiralarım (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2000), 68-69. Interestingly, during his time in Aleppo, his agricultural expertise regarding locusts invasion would be called into question. See DH.H 25.35 and DH.İD 104-1.6, Dürrizade to the Sublime Porte, 26 Şubat 1326 [11 March 1911]. In this letter Dürrizade does not mince words expressing his frustration with Kazım for not taking into account the opinions of local experts on how to handle the locust situation.

354 Türk Ansiklopedisi, (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1943), 420.
355 UKNA, FO 195.2337, Fontana to Lowther, 15 November 1910.
356 MAE, Syrie-Liban 114, French consul to Pichon, 29 August, 1910.
357 The tipping point for the recall of the previous governor, Fakhri Pasha, was his order for the arrest of a critical journalist, Mustafa Azim. See Keith Watenpaugh, “Ottoman Precedents (I): Journalism, Voluntary Association, and the “True Civilization” of the Middle Class,” in Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 68-94.
358 MAE, Syrie-Liban 114, French consul to Pichon, 29 August 1910.
the consul’s observation—having arrived in the city on Friday, the 7th of October 1910, Kazım immediately got to work, publishing a beyannname or announcement in the local newspaper al-Taqaddum on 1 November 1910 excoriating the “oppressive notables” or rather the “notable oppressors.” In addition to generally criticizing them for stealing the assets of orphans and unfortunates and assuring them that he and those government officials true to the bases of the “constitutional administration” had the power to deal with their tyranny, he specifically condemned their practice of “stealing the tithes which are the sacred right of the ‘Beyt al-Mal,’ or rather the property of all the nation.” The essence of the issue was connected to land, in this case, the abuse of tax revenues. His diatribe was not well received by the accused notables.

Kazım’s primary nemesis in the province, Nafi’ Pasha, was actually no stranger to constitutional, parliamentary government. He was in fact the Aleppo delegate to the 1908 Parliament and had also been the region’s delegate to the 1877 Parliament (at the age of 29)—the only delegate to attend both. However, reports of his activities on the local level belied any notion that his presence actually involved representing the interests of the province’s general population. In a 1908 report, two years before Kazım arrived on the scene, the British consul noted Nafi’ Pasha’s overwhelming influence with respect to every aspect of the province’s administration, asserting that “he and members of his family have practically invaded the government house and are fast usurping the powers of the various departments.”

359 See French translation in MAE, Syrie-Liban 114, addendum following French consul to Pichon, 29 August, 1910 and Watenpaugh, “Ottoman Precedents (II): The Technologies of the Public Sphere and the Multiple Deaths of the Ottoman Citizen,” in Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 99-100 for excerpts translated into English from the Arabic. Norman Lewis also mentioned Kazım’s time in Aleppo and compares his reform efforts to those of “the Ba’athist reformers of the 1950s” (Nomads and Settlers in Syria and Jordan, 52).

360 MAE, Syrie-Liban 114, French consul to Pichon, 5 November 1910. This quote continues: “…, and [denying] the legality of the right of those who dare to buy the dimes of your villages.”

361 Hasan Kayali, Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 67, 26, 27.

362 UKNA, FO 195.2272, Longworth to O’Conor, 10 January 1908.
departments infiltrated by their influence he lists the Correspondence department, the Dragomanate, the Civil Court of Appeal, the Examining Court, and the Public Prosecutor’s office. Kazım’s reports back to Istanbul confirmed the degree of Nafi‘ Pasha’s iron grip on the provincial bureaucracy, although he was actually one of three particularly egregious offenders cited by Kazım. The other two, Mudarris Zade Zeki Paşa and Birket Zade Rifat Ağa, had died by the time of Kazım’s arrival, but this did not exempt them from Kazım’s wrath. As he declared in his report, he was sure they were “now, in the afterlife, busy with giving an account of the places they took from the poor.”

Kazım seems to have been particularly affected by an approximately 10-day trip he made throughout the province probably around mid-December 1910. Anxious to examine local conditions first hand, he traveled to İskanderun, Antakya, Belan, Kilis, and Aintab. Upon his return, the French consul noted that for at least three days he did not emerge from his house, prompting rumors that he was about to resign in the face of stiff opposition from the “landed aristocracy.” It seems instead that he was quite busy. By January 8th, he had composed a lengthy report to the Interior Ministry describing everything from the state of the province’s ports, railroads, roads, and marshes to electrification projects, schools, gendarmes, and taxes. Then in late January as the worst winter in local memory descended on the region with temperatures falling to 18 degrees below zero, the town cut off from the outside, and people as well as massive numbers of animals dying from the cold, he set to work coordinating a large

363 Ibid.
364 BOA, DH.ID 44-2.3, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 15 Kanunusani 1326 [28 January 1911].
365 MAE, Syrie-Liban 114, French consul to Pichon, 24 December 1910.
366 BOA, DH.ID 44-1.30, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 26 Kanunuevvel 1326 [8 January 1911].
scale relief effort. At the same time, he also undertook the aforementioned compilation of a set of documents and accompanying reports detailing what he perceived as some of the most egregious examples of local land-related abuse. This file not only provides instructive insight into how provincial petitioners in the Aleppo region perceived and addressed the new regime and its representatives, but it also demonstrates the intersection of Kazım’s desire to embody the revolution’s ideals as its locally-based intermediary with his technocratic priorities.

For Kazım, the heart of the injustices inflicted by Nafi’ Pasha and his extended family related to their manipulation of land ownership and land value to their benefit. Constantly referencing the various tricks (hile) used by them, Kazım described how they would buy a few fields in a village and then next thing one knew they had taken over the whole village by bribing the deed registrar (tapu katibi) with a few gurush. He also identified the agricultural bank as an institution that was created to benefit cultivators, but instead tended to lead more to their ruin. Comparing the local system with America where, so he claimed, a farmer had twenty years to pay back borrowed money with interest, he doubted that such a system would be possible in the province for twenty or perhaps even 100 years. Quite the contrary, not only were loan terms not generous, but any failure to pay interest became an immediate excuse to put a person’s land on the auction block where the “notable oppressors” were able to pick it up for a song. On the other hand when villagers improved their land, they faced difficulties getting its increased value registered.

Kazım illustrated his assertions with a number of anecdotes from his encounters with local farmers. He described a conversation with some villagers near Aintab who explained that

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367 MAE 115, French consul to Pichon, 1 & 7 February 1911; UKNA, FO 195.2366, Fontana to Lowther, 20 March 1911. According to this report, of 270,000 sheep ordered from Mosul only 30,000 made it across the Euphrates.

368 On the issue of ensuring land values were properly evaluated so that loans could be taken out that were commensurate with the land’s value see BOA, DH.ID 44-1.28.
they had improved their land by planting olive trees, vineyards, and orchards, thereby increasing the land’s value from 5-10 gurush twenty years ago to at least 50 lira/dönüm according to the bank’s estimation. Yet, despite the fact that they claimed they were happy to pay higher taxes, they could not get the increased value registered. They thus worried that if their lands were to come to auction the local ağা would be able to acquire them quite cheaply. In another village he encountered a situation where a father, with the consent of his sons, bequeathed a portion of his property to one of his sons whom Kazım describes as “mezcub,” by which he meant disabled, in order to provide for him. Nafi‘ Pasha desired this man’s land and in collusion with one of the man’s brothers they concocted a scheme whereby they made it look like the disabled brother signed a contract and then when he could not pay the “debt” Nafi‘ Pasha used it as a pretext to take his land. In yet one more case, a man by the name of Habib Nezibliyan was paying off a debt from the agricultural bank on some land in Bab kaza when one of the administrative officials (icra memuru), Na‘ib Efendi, contrary to what was written in papers from the bank indicating that the land should not be sold at auction, decided he would sell it to yüzbaşı Arif Efendi. Thus 660 dönüms of land registered for 66,000 gurush were sold to Arif Efendi for some 1000 gurush ostensibly to pay off the remainder of the unpaid debt. Only when Kazım learned of the situation, exclaiming in exasperation “When will rights and justice come to this region (memleket)!,” and intervened did Na‘ib Efendi get scared and cancel the transaction. To further illustrate his claims Kazım included copies of the various petitions (arzuhals), meclis-i idare decisions, and other relevant documents, including a photograph of the wronged meczub. On the one hand, Kazım critiqued the insecurity inherent in such malpractice, which not only deprived people of their land, but reduced their incentive to improve it and thereby to profitably

369 BOA, DH.ID 44-2.3, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 15 Kanunusani 1326 [28 January 1911].
benefit from new agricultural advances. But on a more fundamental level, his critique underscored the state’s inability to exert greater control—demonstrative in his opinion of protected “rights and justice”—over property registration, credit-lending institutions, and taxation.

Despite his efforts, Kazım was stymied by his inability to find a way to exert his authority in these cases against what he referred to with rhetorical flourish as the remnants of the Celali brigands (*Celalilerin bakıyyet-üs-süyuf*). He thus decided to request support from the center, appealing to the interior ministry in Istanbul, asking how the people, despite referencing the new regime’s “justice and equality” in their petitions could actually experience what they claimed they had been promised. Kazım declared that, personally, it was a matter of “honor and self-respect.” It was also, I would argue, an effort to draw the resources of the central state more fully into the local administration, ensuring that local institutions became more productive tools for the state and not just powerful ones for local elites. Kazım threatened his resignation, but insisted that really the solutions should be quite simple, suggesting that the right of jurisdiction should be given to the administrative councils or that people should have the right to appeal decisions handed down from the court of first instance, which would give them recourse to judicial facilities less beholden to the control of a few notables and enable them to finally see “a little justice.” Yet matters only escalated in the aftermath of the harsh winter—a war of telegrams ensued—prompting Kazım to travel to Istanbul on April 14th to explain the situation and, he hoped, obtain greater powers to achieve his aims. At the end of May he returned with

370 Ibid.
371 BOA, DH.ID 44-2.3, Hüseyin Kazım, governor of Aleppo, to the Interior Ministry, 15 Kanunusani 1326 [28 January 1911]. The exact quote is “ya mecalis-i idareye bir hakk-i kaza (right of jurisdiction) veriniz... yahut bu gibi davalar hakkında giyabi ve vicahi her nasıl olursa olsun bidayeten verilecek kararlar yalnız kabil-i temyiz olmak üzere icra-i muvakkatla mevki’ icraya konulsun.”
apparently renewed confidence that he could make a difference and was greeted with great acclaim at the train station—even the British consul thought it likely that the war between Kazım and the notables could “end in the Notables coming in, one by one, and tendering their submission.” Despite this popularity, Kazım still found himself thwarted and eventually returned to Istanbul for good on July 21. Despite overwhelming local support for the governor, Nafi‘ Pasha, or the “respected representative” (*mebus muhteremi*) as Kazım liked to sarcastically refer to him, had prevailed.

Kazım was certainly not alone in the post-1908 era among reform-minded governors throughout the Ottoman provinces in finding himself up against powerful vested local interests. Nonetheless, examining the specificities of his governorship in the Aleppo context does indicate how these attempts at centralizing state reform could be expressed through an idiom derived from the technocratic language of scientific agriculture. His story also suggests that the province of Aleppo had developed a reputation that made it a target of reform efforts—that officials considered it a region within the empire where local powerholders had a disproportionate amount of influence. This situation further complicates our understanding of just how “representative” the government constituted by the 1908 Parliament was and highlights the challenges posed by local elites to its centralizing projects. Finally it provides insight into the dynamics and contradictions that characterized approaches to governance in the late Ottoman period as an uncompromising, technocratic governor with a flair for the theatrical found his “energy, integrity, and capacity,” extensive local support, and even seemingly strong backing from the

373 UKNA, FO 195.2366, Fontana to Lowther, 3 June 1911.
374 See UKNA, FO 195.2366, note sent 21 July 1911 and MAE 115, French consul to de Selves, 22 July 1911.
center thwarted by the well-entrenched interests of Aleppo’s landed gentry and parliamentary representative.\(^{375}\)

**Conclusion**

In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of World War I in the region, the prospects for agricultural expansion in the region seemed promising. Yields were high in comparison with what they would be after the war. One estimate placed wheat production in Syria at 727,700 tons and barley at 450,000 tons—a level that would still not be matched by the early 30s.\(^{376}\) Demand from some cultivators for new technologies coexisted with demand for new plows made according to local designs as local approaches to agricultural practice continued to thrive alongside optimism about the prospects of new scientific agricultural technologies. In April 1914, T.R. Varbedian, the assistant director of the Aleppo agricultural school, expressed interest in placing an order with an American manufacturer for steel and iron plows based on local designs. The American consul suggested the order could be for as many as 200,000 plows, the annual market for plows in the region.\(^{377}\) Meanwhile, another local entrepreneur, Mr. Demirjian, sought to become the exclusive agent in Aleppo for the Walter A. Wood company, an American reaper and mower manufacturer whose machines were among those being demonstrated at the Selemiye agricultural school.\(^{378}\) Such evidence suggests a prevailing confidence at the prospects for agricultural expansion and development in the region. The

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\(^{375}\) MEAE, Syrie-Liban 114, French consul to Pichon, 12 October 1910. See also UKNA, FO 195.2337, Fontana to Lowther, 15 November 1910

\(^{376}\) Albert Khuri, “Agriculture,” in *Economic Organization of Syria*, ed. Sa’id B. Himadeh (Beirut: The American Press, 1936), 78. These figures for wheat are much higher than anything that would be achieved during the mandate up until 1933 and on the whole higher for barley as well within the same time period. The question of how “Syria” is defined in this array of statistics is unclear.

\(^{377}\) USNA, RG 84, Box 6, Aleppo Syria, General Correspondence 1914, Jackson to the Department of State, 9 April 1914.

\(^{378}\) USNA, RG 84, Box 6, Aleppo Syria, General Correspondence 1914, Walter A. Wood export department to Jackson, 25 February 1914.
emphasis on plows of local design, even coming from the assistant director of the Aleppo agricultural school, indicates the extent to which local farmers were interested in taking advantage of conditions conducive to agricultural expansion, but were not yet convinced of the effectiveness and reliability of more expensive, new-fangled machines championed by scientific agriculture advocates.

Nonetheless, these technocrats as well as enthusiasm from local elites had ensured that institutionally, a network of model farms and fields, agricultural schools and classes, as well as depots to showcase implements were providing opportunities for various interested locals to examine and become acquainted with the latest technology. Even in the breadbasket of the Hawran where these institutions did not yet exist, a government employee was duly hired to travel the countryside and demonstrate new tools.

Despite a rhetoric that emphasized scientific agriculture’s capacity to overcome a multitude of ecological and climatic challenges, social and economic reforms considered essential to pushing a state-centered, scientific agriculture agenda continued to pose substantial obstacles. Government institutions like the land registration office and the agricultural bank came under increasing scrutiny, especially after 1908, as reform-minded governors like Kazım sought to curb the power of local elites.\(^{379}\) Regardless of these challenges, the rhetoric of scientific agriculture continued to inspire Ottoman technocrats’ proposals as they laid out programs for provincial reforms. When Hüseyin Kazım outlined his recommendations for the provinces of Beirut and Syria in 1917 he urged giving increased importance to incorporating agricultural classes in preparatory schools and teachers’ colleges, writing “classic,” simple agricultural texts, setting up exhibits in each large town, and establishing institutions with better

\(^{379}\) An imperial order was issued in February 1913 that authorized the mapping of a cadastre “based on a technical survey.” (Albert Khuri, “Land Tenure,” in *Economic Organization of Syria*, ed. Sa'id B. Himadeh (Beirut: The American Press, 1936), 62).
loans terms and cooperative companies. While his earlier efforts at curbing elite power in practice did not produce the desired result, examining a case like Kazim’s demonstrates the connection between the terms used to justify these policies and broader global debates about the implementation of scientific agricultural infrastructure.

Examining the process through which Ottoman officials introduced what they considered a distinct form of scientific agricultural practice into the region provides key insight into the changing nature of administrative relations between center and periphery in the late Ottoman Empire as well as shifting ideas regarding agricultural expertise. Despite centralizing initiatives, mid-level local officials appear to have exercised a high degree of local autonomy in pursuing scientific agriculture experimentation. Often local persistence and agency ensured the implementation of proposed programs in the face of funding issues or administrative changes. Individual prerogatives also seem to have been instrumental in determining the particular shape of these projects. Meanwhile, the increasing emphasis placed on certified, institutionally-acquired agricultural expertise elided the debt its production owed to existing local practice. Although there was clearly an effort to build on local agricultural strengths and areas of expertise, the discourse of scientific agriculture increasingly denoted its sphere of praxis as separate and distinct. It also provided a way for government technocrats to articulate a vision for greater centralized control over the empire’s agricultural production using a framework of peasant enlightenment and imperial justice.

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Chapter 3
THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE IMPERIAL SHIFT: FROM “WELL-PROTECTED DOMAINS” TO FRENCH MANDATE STATES

On the eve of World War I, the Ottoman administration had established a substantial and expanding infrastructure for scientific agricultural education. The government had passed decrees for a new cadastral survey as well as made proposals for how to deal with land tenure like musha’, which its bureaucrats considered particularly inimical to agricultural change. Developments in Bilad al-Sham were no exception to this trend. In particular given the recent settlement of immigrants in the region as well as the expansion of cultivation along the edges of the steppe, administrators seem to have been eager to ensure that some resources were available to farmers even if the those offered through an institution like the agricultural bank were less than what they technically should have been as the bank sent various funds back to the central administration. In the aftermath of the Ottoman retreat from the region during the final months of World War I, the Faysal government in Damascus appears to have attempted to pick up where the Ottoman government left off, continuing many of the same policies, allotting renewed funding to the Ottoman-era institutions that came under their control, and, even as the borders fluctuated, beginning to expound upon an agricultural politic for the region of Bilad al-Sham as a bounded economic entity. While different groups in the region offered contrasting visions of national, agriculture-based, economic self-sufficiency, parties within the French and British governments had already agreed to claims in the areas during the war based on various economic and strategic interests. The French parties, in particular, largely based these claims on existing as well as anticipated agriculture-related investments in and extraction from the region. However in conceptualizing the region’s administration and agricultural value within the French empire, their approach was distinctly different from that of the Ottomans.
In the following chapter, I trace the evolution of this distinction and suggest its implications for the region, which I will explore in greater detail in the final chapters. I argue that whereas the Ottomans had taken a more holistic approach to the administration of the region as an integral part of the empire, the French administration had a more limited view of how to pursue the region’s agricultural development. The Ottoman administration cultivated the eastern Mediterranean as a region that could contribute agriculturally in myriad ways to the “national economy”—a perspective that in its “national” outlook would be perpetuated by technocrats operating under the Faysal government. Proponents of the mandate who were most vocal in the French government in late 1918 and 1919; however, expounded a vision that emphasized the expansion and development of those resources that were of particular use to certain French industrial interests and French imperial self-sufficiency in foodstuffs, most especially grain. They were also keen to ensure the region’s exploitability as a market for French goods, notably those implements and materials associated with “scientific” agricultural methods, in which they hoped to establish a particularly strong presence in this relatively new market. Because of the narrow interests these advocates represented, their expectations from Syrian agricultural production were more focused than had been those of Ottoman bureaucrats or of local technocrats. Local technocrats, in particular, were keen to exploit the vast variety of agricultural possibilities Syria’s environment offered with judicious and studied expansion for promising cash crops and other raw materials for industry. In contrast, mandate officials’ approach exhibited little concern for local aspirations for industrial expansion, much of it agriculture-based, and their prioritized projects, like cotton, did not live up to expectations. Furthermore while Ottoman policies had encouraged the exploration of multiple technologies and techniques,

French reluctance to facilitate any interests other than those operating within the French empire led to more limited options. The resulting tensions driven in no small part by how these policies would affect the agricultural sector over the course of the mandate would contribute definitely to the trajectory and impact of the mandate on the region over the next 25 years.

**Scientific Agriculture on the Eve of and During World War I**

In chapter two, I discussed the dynamics of expertise and some of the setbacks that had characterized the process of building scientific agricultural infrastructure in Bilad al-Sham in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Now, starting with a closer look at the province of Aleppo and expanding out from there, I would like to briefly consider the state of this infrastructure on the eve of World War I in order to assess the culmination of Ottoman administrative strategies since those initial nineteenth-century forays into establishing these institutions.

The province of Aleppo had always been a priority for agricultural institution building in the Ottoman Empire. It was not only a rich agricultural region, but also a key transit point for goods coming from southern Bilad al-Sham or the port of Beirut and headed for wider Anatolia. By 1910, Aleppo had a robust roster of eight salaried civil servants and nine wage laborers employed in the agricultural administration of the province.\(^{382}\) Six were dedicated to general agricultural administration, two worked in the Aleppo depot, two staffed the Aintab silk school (*darülharir*), and seven were employed by the province’s model field.\(^{383}\) Another post—that of a civil servant for the depot—was listed as vacant. All of the salaried civil servants had graduated

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\(^{382}\) This list does not include those teaching agriculture in the local schools—a position for which certified training was also desirable as we saw in chapter 2.

\(^{383}\) BOA, T.ZT 3056.48, chart signed and dated 1 Kanunusani 1327 [14 January 1912] by Agop Oscan. The chart suggests that the total number of employees should have been eighteen—a post listed as depot employee was left blank. The chart also notes that there are plans to establish a dairy school, but this has not yet been achieved.
from either the Halkalı Agricultural School (four) or the Salonika practical agricultural school (three). The highest paid wage laborer was the depot’s ironsmith who had graduated from the Adana Industrial School and had presumably been hired for inevitable machine repairs. Clearly the network of scientifically-trained “experts” being formed in these imperial institutions was starting to bear ample fruit for staffing the local infrastructure of scientific agriculture.

Despite the hiring of these graduates from the empire’s industrial and agricultural schools, the breakdown in the province’s agricultural employees is telling as it suggests an ongoing reliance on local knowledge for practical agricultural activities, especially those related to the model field, under the supervision of “scientifically” trained employees hailing from various regions of the empire. The director in 1910, Emin Zihni Efendi, was from Leskofça in the Balkans, although he had previously served as the director of the Adana model field, while the other salaried posts were held by men from Istanbul, Denizli, and Antalya. However the farmers and gardeners in the province’s model field seem primarily to have come from Aleppo and surrounding villages. While these employees toiled in the fields, the province’s agricultural director compiled statistics on the spring prices per kilo for the province’s crops to be sent to Istanbul. The three-page chart highlighted the diversity of crops and other produce grown in the province, which included nine types of wheat and five types of barley, and incorporated the director’s notes, including his observation that the climate was well-suited to orange-growing but except for Antakya, Iskenderun and parts of Aleppo, better water resources

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384 BOA, T.ZTI 3056.48, chart signed and dated 1 Kanunusani 1327 [14 January 1912] by Agop Oscan.
385 BOA, T.ZTI 3056.48, chart signed and dated 1 Kanunusani 1327 [14 January 1912] by Agop Oscan.
386 BOA, T.ZTI 3056.48, chart signed and dated 1 Kanunusani 1327 [14 January 1912] by Agop Oscan, T.ZTI 3056.24, see table from 1326 [1910/1911]. Emin Zihni Efendi was only in the position for about a year—from 16 August 1326 [29 August 1910] to September 1911 (See CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, “État de Service,” 6 January 1928).
387 BOA, T.ZTI 3056.48, chart signed and dated 1 Kanunusani 1327 [14 January 1912] by Agop Oscan. One notable exception is the employee Mardirus Efendi who was identified as holding the field’s “farmer chieftainship” and came from Sivas. He was possibly the same Mardirus who worked in the field in the 1890s as a guard (See BOA, ŞD 2232.6). How he moved from one position to the other is unclear.
were needed for production to expand. Despite the diverse hometowns of the scientifically-trained employees, prior experience in the region was valued. While Emin Zihni Efendi had previously worked in the Adana field, in 1911 the employee who replaced him as Aleppo agricultural director, Agop Oscan, although he hailed from Istanbul, had already served a multiple-year stint working on Aleppo province’s model farm from 1904-1909. As director in Aleppo he would remain in his post until November 1915 when he would be fired, as he put it, solely for being Armenian.

During Agop Efendi’s time as the Aleppo agricultural director, the region’s agricultural infrastructure was rapidly expanding and Agop Efendi himself, if the charts he compiled and his frequent correspondence are anything to go on, certainly gives the impression of having been an industrious administrator. The Aleppo depot’s collection of implements and those of neighboring depots in Damascus, Homs, and the Hawran continued to grow. By October of 1914, the Aleppo depot had sold 36 out of 126 machines for a total of 11894 gurush 10 para. Out of twenty different kinds of machines sold, the most expensive purchase was a Deering Ideal reaping machine for 9786.10 gurush, one of which had sold, while the most common purchases were those of a plow made in Izmir for 114 gurush (five sold), an Eckert plow (sapan) made for light soils for 99.30 gurush (four sold), and a Rud-sack plow (pulluk) for 230.35 gurush (four sold). Two Alfa Viola cream separators were also purchased for 712.20 gurush each, indicative perhaps of the importance of the dairy industry in the region. While there is no indication as to who the buyers were, given the costs of these implements it would seem more plausible to assume they

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388 BOA, T.ZTı 3056.60, Emin Zihndı Efendi to the Forest, Mines, and Agriculture Ministry, 23 Nisan 1327 [6 May 1911] and see also accompanying chart.
390 BOA, T.ZTI 3057.52. The unsold implements amounted to 9786 gurush 10 para.
391 BOA, T.ZTı 3057.52. The Deering reaper was the only award-winning reaper at the Chicago Exhibit in 1893. Deering Harvesters for 1900 (Chicago: Deering Harvester Co., 1900), 16, https://archive.org/details/deeringharvester00deer.
were relatively well-off farmers or landowners. There is also the possibility that the buyers may have acquired the machines in order to rent them out to various local farmers.

The funds taken in from these sales were deposited in the local agricultural bank branch and periodically portions of them were sent to the central administration.\textsuperscript{392} The highest sales occurred in May, June, August, December, and February, which seems to roughly correspond with some of the busiest times in the annual agricultural calendar, although since the chart does not indicate what implements were sold when it is not possible to trace a direct correlation. The high amounts sold in June and August could also reflect the use of income from the harvest to purchase new equipment.\textsuperscript{393} In 1913/14 [1329], the Aleppo depot imported over 35000 gurush worth of equipment financed in part by the Agricultural Bank (20935.10 gurush) and the Financial Ministry (14712.35 gurush) and exported 13967.25 gurush worth.\textsuperscript{394} Beirut meanwhile went from importing 33460 francs worth of implements in 1909/10 [1325] to 11065 gurush and 53908 francs worth in 1913/14 [1329].\textsuperscript{395} While the bulk of the imports were destined for Nablus and Akka, a number had also been ordered for Tripoli, Latakia, Haifa, the Sanjak of Beirut and Beirut itself.\textsuperscript{396} Such numbers would seem to suggest expanding investment in these new technologies.

Meanwhile other depots were also gradually increasing their stocks according, it would seem, to local demand. The Hawran, known for its productive wheat fields, had its own dedicated

\textsuperscript{392} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52. Chart signed by Agop and dated 29 Haziran 1330 [12 July 1914]. In the year 1329 [1913/14] funds were sent to the central administration in May, August, September and January.
\textsuperscript{393} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52. Chart signed by Agop, the depot director, and the agriculture clerk and dated 29 Haziran 1330 [12 July 1914].
\textsuperscript{394} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52. Exports and imports chart signed by Agop, the depot director, and the agriculture clerk and dated 29 Haziran 1330 [12 July 1914].
\textsuperscript{395} The machines imported in francs and those imported in gurush represent two different groups of implements. Most of the instruments imported for Akka, Nablus, Haifa, and Beirut were denominated in francs, while those destined for Trablus and Latakia were the ones primarily denominated in gurush.
\textsuperscript{396} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52. Chart for 1329 signed by Theologos dated 18 Haziran 1330 [1 July 1914]; Chart for 1325 signed by Theologos dated 18 Haziran 1330 [1 July 1914].
depot. In 1911/12 [1327], it took in 66 implements worth 26668.10 gurush and in 1912/13 [1328] it acquired 686 tools worth 67653.35 gurush. Among the most popular were a series of plows made by “Syracuse”—a reference to the US-based Syracuse Chilled Plow Company. From an order of three each of the Syracuse 0 and 00 plows the depot increased its stock the following year with thirty more of each, suggesting that these plows were finding favor with local farmers. Syracuse made both of these plows specifically for plowing on hillsides and they had been among their plows displayed at the 1893 Columbian Exhibition and listed as among their models for export. Given that the hillsides of the Hawran could pose challenges to using certain new implements as described in chapter 1, these plows most likely had particular appeal because of their suitability to this topography. Perhaps another attractive feature was their “chilled wearing parts”—that is their metal parts cast through a process invented and patented in the United States whereby the outside of the moldboard, which was subject to the most wear as it was pulled through the soil, was made more durable while the interior of the metal was cooled more slowly making it stronger. By 1913/14 [1329], the depot was also beginning to increase

397 BOA, T.ZTI 3057.52, Chart of “Agricultural tools and implements that arrived in 1327 to the Hawran agricultural implement depot” and chart of “Agricultural implements that arrived in 1328 to the Hawran depot,” 20 Nisan 1330 [3 May 1914].
398 BOA, T.ZTI 3057.52, Chart of “Agricultural tools and implements that arrived in 1327 to the Hawran agricultural implement depot” and chart of “Agricultural implements that arrived in 1328 to the Hawran depot,” 20 Nisan 1330 [3 May 1914].
399 “Implement Exhibits at the Columbian Exhibition,” Farm Implement News, 14, no. 18 (4 May 1893): 22, https://books.google.com/books?id=wdM0AQAAMAAJ&pg=RA1-PA53&dq=farm+implement+news+syracuse+55+1893&hl=en&sa=X&ei=XsKiVb-ZtYm1-AGTpIHgAw&ved=0CDcQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=syracuse&f=false
its stock of Ottoman-produced implements, counting five Izmir plows among its stock, which, like the Aleppo depot, it valued at 114 gurush each.\textsuperscript{401}

The Damascus and Homs depots were also gradually increasing their stock of implements. Between 1910/11 [1326] and 1913/14 [1329] the depot in Damascus imported a total of 179 implements valued at 58109.70 gurush and by the beginning of 1914/15 [1330] it had in stock a total of 93 valued at 26188.25 suggesting that at least 86 implements with a value of 31921.45 gurush had been sold.\textsuperscript{402} In 1329, the Homs depot was stocked with 119 implements (comprising 32 different kinds), three of which—a German Eckert plow for light soils, an American Deering harvester, and a French Marot grain sorter—had been sold by the beginning of 1914/15 [1330].\textsuperscript{403} While the depot inventory lists tend to be dominated by German manufacturers such as Rud-sack and Eckert as well as American companies such as Deering and Syracuse with some French products also of interest, Ottoman-made products such as the Izmir plow also appeared with increasing frequency. Instruments seem to have been carefully selected from the vast varieties available based on which seemed well-suited to varying local conditions. Then presumably after observing local experiments, farmers would have the option to purchase from the depot’s stock. Providing farmers with an array of options developed in a variety of countries and regions was clearly central to Ottoman administrative priorities.

But distributing this new equipment was not without its challenges. Agop Efendi expressed particular concern about ensuring the effectiveness of the Aleppo depot to house, handle, and supply new farm implements arriving from Beirut. On multiple occasions he wrote

\textsuperscript{401} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52, Chart of “Agricultural tools and implements that arrived in 1329 to the Hawran agricultural implement depot,” 20 Nisan 1330 [3 May 1914]. This is still a bit more expensive than the Syracuse plows, which were priced at 70.24 gurush (No. 0) and 99.74 gurush (No. 00) each in 1328 [1912/13].

\textsuperscript{402} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52, Charts for Damascus depot dated 1326, 1327, 1328, and 1329; BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.59, Chart for Damascus depot indicating numbers of implements present at beginning of 1330.

\textsuperscript{403} BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.52, Homs chart for 1329; BOA, T.ZTİ 3057.60, Homs chart for 1330.
to express his frustration at the state in which certain tools arrived. Improperly-insured implements were apparently arriving in a broken or deficient state and this was posing a quandary.\textsuperscript{404} The depots’ employees, he suggested, could repair them, but they would need additional funds to cover the costs and a properly insured contractor was key for transferring them on to more distant, internal provinces such as Urfa, Zor, Baghdad, Mosul and Diyarbekir.\textsuperscript{405} His multiple requests to deal with the issue underline the additional demands these instruments placed on local infrastructure as well as the priority given by the local administration to making sure these implements were properly maintained and distributed.

Thus as the Ottoman Empire entered World War I in the fall of 1914, its scientific agricultural infrastructure seemed to be rapidly expanding, albeit with a few glitches. In Bilad al-Sham the depots were well-stocked and located not just in provincial centers such as Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut, but also in highly productive agricultural regions like Homs and the Hawran, providing a breadth of access to local farmers. In addition, the state continued to prioritize agricultural institutions such as schools and model farms while, according to the logic of its “national economy” program, the CUP government took various steps to protect local production such as canceling the capitulations in September 1914 and introducing higher customs tariffs in the fall of 1914 and spring of 1915.\textsuperscript{406}

\textsuperscript{404} BOA, T.ZTI 3057.57, Aleppo agriculture director Agop to the Commerce and Agricultural Mininstry, 10 Haziran 1330 [23 June 1914] and copy of Vilayet Agricultural Directorship’s 8 Temmuz? 1330 date and 4142/122 number addendum, 13 Temmuz? 1330 [26 July 1914].

\textsuperscript{405} BOA, T.ZTI 3057.57, Aleppo agriculture director Agop to the Commerce and Agricultural Mininstry, 10 Haziran 1330 [23 June 1914]. See BOA, T.ZTI 3057.44 for an example of an insurance contract.

The war, however, would lead to a breakdown in provisioning capacity, inflation, lack of labor and transportation, and at times environmental challenges to agricultural production. There were nonetheless efforts to maintain and expand this infrastructure related over the course of it. Even as panic started to spread in Beirut over the disruptions in the wheat supply to the city in the spring of 1915, in Syria the governor was seeking ways to make up for a shortfall in the funds needed to establish an agricultural school in Damascus--30,000 gurush had been allotted, but an additional 25,000 was necessary.

Labor and transportation shortages in the eastern Mediterranean posed major obstacles to maintaining the momentum that had characterized pre-war efforts at building agricultural infrastructure and shoring up its contribution to the “National Economy.” The allied blockade of the coast and the restriction of the railroad to military necessities made importing implements and “useful plants” from the United States or Europe impossible. Furthermore, despite funds allotted to continue to pay for the salaries of agriculture teachers and employees to operate agricultural implement depots, qualified individuals were unavailable to replace conscripted agriculture teachers from Salt, Ba‘albak, al-Biqa’, Hama, Quneitra, and Nebek. As for the depots, the one in Homs remained staffed, while an administrator (müdür) and a teacher were engaged to replace the conscripted employees from the Damascus and Dera’a (Hawran) depots respectively.

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408 DH.UMVM 132.35, Governor Hulusi to the Interior Ministry, 27 Mayıs 1331 [9 June 1915].
409 DH.UMVM 137.22, Agriculture director of the province of Syria “Report on the province of Syria’s agricultural affairs concerning the 1331 annual budget,” 22 Kanunuevvel 1332 (4 January 1917).
410 DH.UMVM 137.22, “Report on the province of Syria’s agricultural affairs”; DH.UMVM 147.80, From the Agriculture director of the province of Syria, “Report on the operations of the agricultural budget for the year 1332,” 8 Nisan 1333 (8 April 1917).
Such labor shortages as well as the existence of the applied agriculture school in Selamiye and the agricultural industry school in Taanayel led the Commerce and Agriculture Minister to suggest to the Interior Ministry that a third agricultural school in Syria was not in fact necessary despite funding allotments finally being made from taxes for “a nighttime agricultural school.”  

Although the school in Syria was not established for “some reasons,” the funds allotted for it were transferred to Taanayel, where a school was opened on 7 November 1916 with 60 students and where, as of April 1917, lessons and experiments were ongoing. In the face of the hardships and staff issues posed by the war, there was clearly a will to maintain agricultural education, demonstrating the priority placed locally on cultivating this particular form of agricultural expertise.  

Furthermore, while a new school may not have been in the cards for the province of Syria, its model field was in full swing with five dönüms of vineyard/gardens and five of fruit trees, as well as various kinds of wheat and barley in addition to flax and corn, the latter of which soldiers ate fresh. While new educational institutions needed to be put on hold, experimentation was ongoing.

Efforts were focused not only on central Bilad al-Sham, but also on its more remote regions as well. Even in the eastern district of Deir el-Zor, located on the banks of the Euphrates in the heart of pastoralist countryside and surrounded by desert beyond the reach of the river’s waters, lands were being delimited and taken as eminent domain for the establishment of a model field in 1917 and 1918. Already eight of the town’s ashrar, or as Zor’s mutassarif referred to them “those who desire the region’s progress” (memleketin terakkisi arzu eden) had brought

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411 DH.UMVM 137.22, Commerce and Agriculture Minister Mustafa to the Interior Ministry, 12 Şubat 1332 (25 February 1917); DH.UMVM 145.41, Draft to Prime Minister(?), 16 Kanunusani 1332 [29 January 1917].
412 DH.UMVM 147.80, “Report on the operations,” 8 Nisan 1333 (8 April 1917); DH.UMVM 147.103, Defterdar in the name of the Syrian governor to the Interior Ministry, 9 Nisan 33 [9 April 1917]; Draft to the Commerce and Agriculture Ministry, 5 Mayıs 1332 [18 May 1916].
413 DH.UMVM 147.80, “Report on the operations,” 8 Nisan 1333 (8 April 1917); Chart “Damascus model field 331-332 agricultural year crop table,” 8 Nisan 1333 [8 April 1917].
some things from Aleppo to donate to the industrial school.\textsuperscript{414} While there appears to have been some contestations over the delimitation of lands for the model field, clearly there was a sense of cooperation between certain local elites and government authorities as to the importance of agricultural and industrial development strategies in the region even as the final years of the war and the ravages of famine gripped the region.\textsuperscript{415} The war strained all agricultural infrastructure, not just the scientific kind.\textsuperscript{416} Nonetheless, despite the lack of personnel, transportation, and imports, there remained an administrative will to maintain as much as possible the infrastructure that had been built, such as existing depots and model fields, and to even start laying the groundwork for new ones.

\textbf{The Agricultural Politics of Postwar Bilad al-Sham}

In the fall of 1918 with Faysal’s army and a British force approaching from the south and eventually occupying Damascus, Ottoman administrative personnel met in Aleppo to start the process of withdrawing themselves as well as significant records and monetary resources to the north.\textsuperscript{417} Among the monetary resources taken were 447,000 Turkish gold pounds from the region’s agricultural banks’ capital and 396,000 Turkish gold pounds of their deposits.\textsuperscript{418} French and British forces meanwhile had occupied the west coast of Syria in October 1918 and started

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{414} DH.İ.UM 11-5.9/26, Zor mutassarifi to Interior Ministry, 29 Kanunusani 1334 [29 January 1918], chart of land to be taken by eminent domain dated 27 Haziran 1333 [27 June 1917].
\item \textsuperscript{415} DH.İ.UM 11-5.9/26, Zor mutassarifi to Interior Ministry, 29 Kanunusani 1334 [29 January 1918]. It is not clear to me whether Zor was subject to the same extent of famine deprivation that affected areas further west.
\item \textsuperscript{416} This presents a stark contrast to the United States where the war fueled capital investment in agriculture which in turn encouraged innovation and investment in new machinery. In some places, however, the results were disastrous as farmers applied the new machines in a grassland ecology where their thorough plowing of the grasses on an extensive scale throughout the southern plains of the United States led to the Dust Bowl in the 1930s. See Donald Worster, \textit{Dust Bowl: The Southern Plains in the 1930s} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 89-97.
\item \textsuperscript{417} BOA, DH.ŞFR 597.49, Abdülhahk to the Interior Ministry, 4 Teşrinievvel 1334 (4 October 1918).
\item \textsuperscript{418} Sa‘id B. Himadeh, “Monetary and Banking System” in Sa‘id B. Himadeh, ed., \textit{Economic Organization of Syria} (Beirut: The American Press, 1936), 313. Because the Lausanne Treaty did not require repayment of these amounts, the banks’ capital from its deposit transactions was severely hurt. However, Himadeh notes that the banks’ inherited the assets, but not the liabilities of the Ottoman Agricultural bank, suggesting some assets must have been left behind (313).
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
distributing grain and other forms of sustenance to a population whose suffering they had intensified throughout the war as a result of their coastal blockade. \(^419\) Despite the uncertainty and shifting dynamics of power in the post-war moment, Faysal’s Arab government in Damascus, to the extent that they could exercise and implement government policies given various financial and political constraints, seemed intent to continue the kinds of agricultural policies that had characterized the latter decades of Ottoman rule. Yusuf Hakim, a graduate of the American School in Latakia and the Sultani school who had served in various administrative capacities in Mt. Lebanon until 1918 and who would go on to write a number of accounts of the region under Ottoman rule, the Faysal government, and the French Mandate in Syria, would serve as the Minister of Public Works (including Commerce and Agriculture) during this period. \(^420\)

According to Hakim and official government sources from this period, the government placed a premium on appointing those with the requisite expertise of “modern agriculture” to fulfill positions in the government aimed at “agricultural advancement.” Within his Ministry, Hakim cited among the reasons for its “great fortune” the enlistment of Mustafa al-Shihabi with his high diploma in agricultural engineering from a “French university” as Director of the Agricultural Division. \(^421\) On 20 February 1919, the Parliament (Majlis al-Shura) created a seven-member agriculture committee whose expertise, but also status as landowners, was considered crucial to their qualifications. In particular they were identified as “having knowledge of modern


\(^{421}\) Hakim, Faysali, 145.
agriculture methods and the needs of agriculture” with preference given to those who had graduated from the agricultural school.422

The initiatives undertaken by the Faysal government seem to have essentially continued or built upon those already in motion in the years immediately before the war or during it. In addition to organizing “detailed charts” (jadawil mufassala) for taxation purposes and detailed maps (khara’it mufassala) to establish borders—that is, a mapped cadastral survey—the administration continued policies of importing seeds and plants, selling “European” agricultural implements to farmers at “reasonable prices,” and bringing employees to teach various aspects of “modern” agricultural practice. The government also encouraged the formation of agricultural companies and claimed to establish unions for farmers in villages. An agricultural company capitalized with 100,000 Egyptian pounds was formed in Aleppo with branches in the province’s kazas and was granted a concession on 24 March 1919 to import agricultural equipment at 10% profit exempt from customs.423 In November 1918, the government (re?)opened an agricultural bank in Damascus with branches throughout the region and on 10 June 1920, it published a decree establishing chambers of agriculture which were to have weekly meetings in addition to setting out each January an annual program, which would be reported to the central government.424

In addition to these administrative endeavors, the government was also keen on expanding institutions for agricultural education. It established an agricultural school in the Damascus region, more specifically in the Ghouta—the fertile oasis surrounding Damascus, where students carried out various “studies” between 1918-1919 that would become the basis for

422 Khayriyah Qasimiya, al-Hukuma al-‘Arabiya fi Dimashq bayna 1918-1920 (Dar al-Ma’arif bi-Misr, 1971), 224. Qasimiya’s source for these developments during the Faysal period consists almost exclusively of reports from “al-‘Asima”—the official government newspaper—as well as a personal conversation with Yusuf al-Hakim.
423 Qasimiya, al-Hukuma al-‘Arabiya, 224-225.
al-Shihabi’s book *al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya al-Haditha* [Modern Practical Agriculture], published in 1922.⁴²⁵ Although the school would only last for one year before being consolidated with the Selemiye school, its brief existence can be seen as having fulfilled the Ottoman plans that had been under consideration, but had been hindered for various reasons during the final years of the war.⁴²⁶ There was also a plan to turn a barracks in Dera’a (a town in the Hawran) into an agricultural school—another proposal as discussed in chapter two that had been under consideration prior to the war—and the government set aside 500 pounds to repair it. The Selemiye school meanwhile was to become a preparatory agricultural school with 1500 pounds in funds allocated to assist 50 children of “poor farmers” attend for free.⁴²⁷

Experimenting with new implements—agricultural technology had changed significantly since the start of the war—was also a priority. In 1920, the Syrian government, which “had decided to buy some agricultural machines, especially tractors,” planned to hold a competition in Damascus during which various companies would exhibit and then demonstrate their machines. Extending an invitation to French manufacturers, it requested information about their availability so that it could plan the competition at a time that would allow them to attend.⁴²⁸ Despite limited resources and the devastation wrought by the war, this rapid succession of proposals, decrees, exhibitions, and financial allotments suggest that under the Faysal government and more specifically under the direction of al-Shihabi, investment in agricultural infrastructure and “modern” agricultural practice remained a priority. Continuing many Ottoman-era policies, the

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⁴²⁶ Al-Shihabi, *al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya al-Haditha* [Modern Practical Agriculture], p. 11.
⁴²⁸ MAE, Syrie-Liban 75, Secretary of the delegation of the Hedaz [sic] to the Minister [of Agriculture], 25 March 1920. When the Minister of Agriculture requested the Minister of Foreign Affairs’ opinion on the matter, he was informed that he shouldn’t respond because the Delegation should have addressed their request to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (MAE Syrie-Liban 75, Minister of Agriculture to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1 April 1920; Draft about “Exposition de Damas,” 9 April 1920).
Faysal government pursued a state-centered approach that sought to document the lands that had come under its rule, expand its infrastructure in the countryside, provide sources of capital, collect feedback, and establish annual plans through locally-appointed committees.

In this context, al-Shihabi’s book, discussed in greater detail in chapter 1, can be seen as offering a framework within which the state could begin to plan a comprehensive strategy for the region’s agricultural exploitation. By classifying the soils and climatic conditions that shifting borders and centers of power had brought within the purview of the envisioned Syrian state, he then suggested how they could best be used to advantage for resource production and future “development.” However, by the time his book was published in 1922, the French had successfully pressed their occupation of the coast inland, defeating Syrian forces at the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920 and gradually installing the apparatus of mandate rule, which had been sanctioned at the conference of San Remo in April 1920. The result was the partitioning of the region between British mandates in Transjordan and Palestine to the south and the French mandates in Syria and Lebanon in the north essentially according to the dictates of the Sykes-Picot agreement.

This eventual division of the region did not just represent French and British attempts to further their interests in the region. The northern division that separated Greater Lebanon from Syria constituted another concept of national wholeness based in no small part on greater self-sufficiency in agricultural resources, one that had significant influence on French mandate policy makers. While al-Shihabi delighted in the agricultural diversity of the region and the economic possibilities it offered Bilad al-Sham for a high degree of agricultural self-sufficiency, in Beirut another group of elites intent on an independent Lebanon urged their own vision of agricultural

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self-sufficiency as justification for redrawing the borders that would define this “Greater” Lebanon’s geography.

This group, led by Charles Corm and consisting of various eminent, Francophile personalities, argued for the carving out of an independent Lebanon with French support that could be both politically and economically independent.430 They set forth their proposals in *La Revue Phenicienne*, which consisted of four issues published in July, August, September, and December of 1919. A cornerstone of their plan was the need to redraw the boundaries of the Ottoman-designated “administrative Lebanon” in order to encompass what one of their number, Albert Naccache, deemed “natural Lebanon.”431 “Administrative” Lebanon had been defined by the Ottoman government as Mt. Lebanon and the coasts immediately north and south of Beirut from Tripoli to Saida, but did not include Beirut or the Biqa’ valley to the west, which were part of the Ottoman provinces of Beirut and Syria respectively.432

Naccache in the very first article of the journal’s inaugural issue, “Our Economic Future,” argued for the “natural,” geographical integrity of the proposed Greater Lebanon region based on the nature of the slopes of Mt. Lebanon and the anti-Lebanon. This “natural” geography, in particular the addition of the Biqa’ Valley, Ba‘albak, and plain of Akkar, was in no small part premised on the economic and in particular the agricultural self-sufficiency these “natural” borders would ensure.433 In fact, according to his article, the main injustice perpetrated by the Ottoman administration, represented by Fouad Pasha in the aftermath of 1860 when these

430 Albert Naccache, “Notre Avenir Economique,” *La Revue Phenicienne* (July 1919): 7, 8. Asher Kaufman, *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014), 89. According to Kaufman this was not always Corm’s position. In fact up until at least the spring of 1919, Corm was also advocating for a united, independent Syria, although from a perspective that was distinct from that of the Damascus-based Faysal government (Kaufman, *Reviving*, 88-89).
administrative boundaries were created, was its “confining the Lebanese in a rocky and unproductive territory” with “830 inhabitants per square kilometer of cultivable land.”

Lebanon’s economic equilibrium depended on three factors: remits from America, free silkworm importation from France and Italy and silk exportation to France, and “the freedom to receive from the interior the necessary cereals for the subsistence of men and animals.” The areas that would be added as part of “natural” Lebanon would thus include sufficient grain-growing regions that would enable the Lebanese to feed themselves. To further develop these resources another contributor urged the establishment of more model farms, referring to the Taanayel farm of the Jesuits as an example.

Another author, Assad Bey Younes, praised the efforts of the Lebanese peasant to bring forth from the mountains’ rocky soil—the toils of their labors, he claimed, contrasted with agriculture’s “state of decrepitude” in surrounding provinces. He explained how from personal visits to villages and other authoritative sources he could assess the 1890-1900 agricultural production of Lebanon to be around 31 million francs—the majority of them (16 million) came from silk while only 6 million came from a combination of cereals and potatoes (the same as that from olive oil). To achieve “agricultural progress”—to return to the journal’s ongoing refrain—Lebanon’s hardworking peasants needed to industrialize agriculture under an “autonomous government.”

Thus while al-Shihabi and the contributors to *La Revue Phenicienne* conveyed distinct visions of regional self-sufficiency and national spaces, central to each was a diverse

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436 Naccache, “Notre Avenir Economique” 5.
440 Younes, “L’Agriculture au Liban,” 260, 261. He insists that maintaining adequate labor in Lebanon was even more crucial than in the surrounding provinces because agricultural machines could be used there while in Lebanon the topography made that impossible.
agriculture that would serve as a firm basis for internal provisioning or, at least, industrial expansion.

It did not take long for the French to respond to these aspirations for an independent Lebanon—following closely on the heels of the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920, the French declared the formation of the state of Lebanon in August 1920.441 From 1920-1923, borders representing divisions between British and French mandatory regions, between the French mandate and the Turkish nation-state, and between the different statelets--namely those of Damascus (or Syria), Aleppo, the ‘Alawite state, Jabal Druze and the Sanjak of Alexandretta--that composed the French mandate of Syria and as well as the boundary that now separated Greater Lebanon within that space gradually took shape. These borders created various administrative, political, and economic distinctions that posed practical challenges to any kind of holistic vision of the region’s agricultural exploitation, although French officials largely carved out Greater Lebanon according to the boundaries desired by La Revue Phenicienne.442

While Mt. Lebanon gained a larger hinterland, other regions lost vast swathes of theirs. In the north the boundary established between the Turkish nation state and the territory under French mandate, which was eventually defined for the majority of its length by the line of the Baghdad railway, effectively cut the city of Aleppo off from half of the former Ottoman province of Aleppo as well as the broader Anatolian hinterland that had been a key destination for its merchandise.443 This created particular problems for Aleppan wholesalers. As forms of financial and administrative separation started to evolve one of the most contentious perhaps was the customs barriers that now emerged between Aleppo and Anatolia. As the Economic Journal of

441 Khoury, Syria, 57.
443 See Article 8 of the “Despatch from His Majesty’s Ambassador at Paris enclosing the Franco-Turkish Agreement signed at Angora on October 20, 1921” (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1921), 3, http://www.hri.org/docs/FT1921/Franco-Turkish_Pact_1921.pdf.
Aleppo in its first issue in July-August 1925 pointed out, for 400 years Aleppan wholesalers had developed strong ties with merchants in the interior and now local businesses were going bankrupt. The border and its accompanying restrictions had complicated transactions to the point that their usual Anatolia clients were taking their business to place like Adana and Mersin, just on the other side of the border, leaving their Aleppan suppliers in the lurch.444

The restrictions placed on trade passing through the region made increasing agricultural production and industrial capacity even more vital.445 In this vein, the journal then preceded to devote half of its articles to very specific agricultural concerns such as locusts, new machines, especially tractors, and fertilizers. Many of the same themes that had characterized journalistic representations of this phenomenon during the Ottoman period prevailed—that agriculture had acquired “a purely scientific form,” that even as rural populations were moving to urban areas, “educated, energetic youth” of more privileged classes were returning to the land—a movement further spurred with the onset of the mandate by the lack of opportunity in the domain of commerce as well as competition in the liberal professions.446 But science (‘ilm) was not the only defining feature of the agriculture of the future, “association” (tasharuk) was its necessary complement. Echoing the sentiments that had already been expressed two decades prior, the journal asserted the need for agricultural syndicates that would be based on “mutuality” (ta’adhud) and “solidarity” (tadhamun).447

Despite enthusiasm for these new techniques, some local landowners seem to have been wary about putting too much faith in these new methods and those trained in foreign schools to

444 “La Situation Economique,” al-Majalla al-Iqtisadiya/La Revue Economique 1:1 (July-August 1925): 5. The journal was published in French and Arabic each language in side by side columns. I do not know if more than one issue was published. I have not been able to locate others at this point.
447 “L’Agriculture,” 18.
apply them. The journal noted the lack of opportunities for young agronomists who had studied abroad to apply their knowledge locally and lamented the reluctance of rich local landowners to hire these “specialists,” insisting that these agronomists with their knowledge could extract ten times more than their fee. While such reluctance could potentially be seen as a refusal to invest in their lands, perhaps it might suggest instead a preference for the locally-acquired and reliable knowledge of the fellahin over the locally untried knowledge of these “scientifically” trained youths no matter how much time they had spent on model fields in France.

After all, the journal itself was quite frank about the pitfalls of new machines and the challenges they could pose. While tractors, in particular, could provide a potentially “revolutionary” solution to the necessity of leaving land fallow due to labor’s scarcity and high cost as well as the cost of animals, these machines had, it acknowledged, proven problematic in the beginning. And although it suggested they were becoming more sophisticated and suitable to different environments, it still offered a relatively long list of the things an interested party needed to ascertain before investing in one—ease of use so one would not need a specialist for repairs; a good grip for sufficient traction, but light and even pressure because if it compressed the soil too much it would be sterile; low fuel consumption; easily interchanged pieces so a machine would not be immobilized for long, etc. Such a list suggested a number of potential issues that could frustrate the farmer who invested in such machines without sufficient knowledge of local plowing practices and soil type. One also needed to ensure there was adequate access to spare parts. In order to encourage its readers to consider purchasing one of these machines, the journal offered free guidance. Ultimately despite the reluctance of some,

448 “L’Agriculture,” 19.
449 For this suggestion of reluctance see Khoury, Syria, 446.
there was clearly a market. Just beneath the article, an ad for the merchant Nagib Baki featured a
drawing of an Avery tractor and offered all variety of agricultural implements from the “greatest
factories of the world” (a’tam fabarik al-alam), suggesting at least one merchant considered
the investment worth it. ⁴⁵²

The Economic Journal’s owner was Na’im Janbart and featured photos of prominent
directors and inspectors in the local Aleppan and Syrian administration, including an opening
photo of Salim Janbart, a well-off merchant and the president of the Aleppo Chamber of
Commerce who was known for his more moderate positions towards mandate politics. ⁴⁵³ Thus
its tone and suggestions for agricultural development presented these technologies and the
administrative principles that would facilitate their use as a depoliticized matter of “science” and
its proper application.

In contrast, a journal published entirely in Arabic out of Hama by local technocrats
associated with the Selemiye agricultural school, al-Zira’a al-Haditha [Modern Agriculture],
tackled the technical and administrative issues involved in this process in far greater breadth and
depth and with a far more trenchant angle of political critique. ⁴⁵⁴ Published between 1924 and
1932, it is not possible to know the breadth of the journal’s circulation with any exactness,
although it does seem to have been read throughout the region. ⁴⁵⁵ According to al-Mar’a, a
women’s journal published in Hama, al-Zira’a al-Haditha “does not lack praise and
commendation because what it has regarding the relationship with the agricultural wealth of the

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⁴⁵³ See the al-Majalla al-Iqtisadiya/La Revue Economique. I am assuming that Salim and Na’im were related but
have been unable to determine how exactly. Khoury, Syria, 379-80.
⁴⁵⁴ “Al-Suhuf wa al-Majallat,” Al-Mar’a 2:2 (February 1932): 24. Al-Mar’a was another journal published out of
Hama by Nadima al-Sabuni with the proclaimed goal of “raising the level of the woman” (“Taqdim al-Majalla,” Al-
Mar’a 1:1 (October 1930): 2).)
⁴⁵⁵ At least this was the extent of the print run I was able to locate.
country, which farmers cannot do without, ensures its spread and progress.” It also had a relatively active “Barid al-Qurra’” [Post of the Readers] section where people could write in with questions or observations, which it would publish. The well-established journal, \textit{al-‘Irфан}, which was based in Saida in southern Lebanon and published on a variety of topics, included cartoons excerpted from \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} to accompany its own article about agriculture. While it seems to have been the only journal of such quality and longevity in the region exclusively devoted to agricultural concerns, it also appears to have circulated relatively widely.

The educational trajectories and careers of many of the journal’s main contributors place them squarely in networks of technocratic expertise dating from the late Ottoman period. One of the main contributors to the journal, Tawfiq al-Ahdab, was born in 1891 and studied in the Hama ‘idadi school and the Laique school in Beirut before continuing his studies in Paris where he earned a diploma from the Grignon agricultural school in 1919. After additional training in Belgium and then working his own land near Hama, he was forced to flee to the Alawite mountains in 1923 “due to his lack of agreement with [French] policies.” He would eventually return to Hama to run the Selemiye agricultural school before moving to Aleppo where he would take up the post of “general inspector for agriculture of the northern area” until 1946. Al-Ahdab suggested that the most important steps to encourage agriculture in Syria involved establishing cooperative societies and agricultural associations, undertaking exhibits, forming agricultural chambers, improving infrastructure such as roads, and helping small property owners.

\footnote{456}{“Al-Suhuf wa al-Majallat,” \textit{Al-Mar’a} 2:2 (February 1932): 24.}
\footnote{457}{See for example, “al-Zira’a wa al-Sina’a,” \textit{al-‘Irfan}, 13:7 (March 1927): 804-815.}
\footnote{458}{There was at least one other agricultural journal that I think was also published out of the region entitled \textit{al-Hayat al-Zirai’ya}. \textit{Al-Zira’a al-Haditha} included at least one excerpt from it, but I have not been able to locate copies of it, nor does it seem to have had a very long print run (See “al-Muqtatat,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 5:5 (March 1932): 332 which includes an except from volume 1 issue 3 of the journal).}
\footnote{459}{Faris, \textit{Min Howa fi Suriya}, 16.}
\footnote{460}{Faris, \textit{Min Howa fi Suriya}, 16. After independence he would go on to become the \textit{wikala} of the Directorate of National Economy and in 1948 he would be appointed the general director for Agricultural Matters in the Ministry of the National Economy.}
owners, especially with regards to holding onto their land if they fell into financial difficulty.\footnote{Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “al-Hala al-Zira’iya fi Suriya” \emph{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:1 (January 1924): 15; Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Dara’ib al-Zira’a fi Suriya 2,” \emph{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:9 (September 1924): 466.}

In many ways, his suggestions reflected those proposed by Hüseyin Kazım in \emph{Vilayeti Beirut} just seven years earlier.

Other contributions from a number of prominent figures within the administration and other institutions associated with agriculture further fleshed out his proposals. The journal’s editor, Omar Termanini (and maybe eventually his brother Said), who would become the director of the Selemiye school after al-Ahdab, provided frequent, often quite caustic, commentary on proposed reforms and their lack of implementation.\footnote{I will go into this in more detail in chapter 4.} Interestingly, Omar Termanini and al-Ahdab had both been awarded a \textit{Mérit Agricole}, but as of 1925 were also clearly under surveillance for “directing propaganda hostile to the mandate.”\footnote{CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 861, Services Economiques—Sanjak de Homs (1925?), “École d’Agriculture de Salamieh,” n.d.; Faris, \textit{Min Howa fi Suriya}, 247.} The journal also printed the transcripts of a series of lectures given to the Science Academy in Damascus by Mustafa al-Shihabi, the Director of Agriculture and Forests from 1918-1923 and Director of State Lands from 1923-1934 in 1928 and 1929.\footnote{Adnan al-Khatib, \textit{al-Amir Mustafa al-Shihabi, 1893-1968}, (Dimashq: Matba’a al-Taraqqi, 1968), 12; for one of his speeches see for example, Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiya wa talafiha” \emph{Zira’a al-Haditha} 4:1 (November 1928), 7-14.} Other contributors included Ahmad Wasfi Zakariya, Yusuf Atallah, and al-Amir Muhammad ‘Abd al-‘Aziz al-Jaza’iri. Zakariya had graduated with an agricultural engineering degree from the Halkalı Agricultural School in Istanbul in 1912 and then taught at the Selemiye agricultural school, eventually becoming its headmaster until 1914.\footnote{In 1914 Wasfi Zakariya went to work in the “House of Silk” directorship in Beirut, then taught in the Latrun school between Yafa and Jerusalem before being drafted into the army during WWI. (Ahmad Wasfi Zakariya, \textit{al-Qura wa al-Baladat fi Janub Bilad al-Sham} (Dimashq : Dār wa-Mu’assasat Raslan, 2008), 10-11.)} After the war, he headed the Selemiye agricultural school again until 1924 when he became an inspector for state lands, but left Syria in 1936 for Yemen and then Iraq where his agricultural
expertise was apparently in demand.\textsuperscript{466} Atallah studied agriculture at Grignon in France, then specialized in finance, administration, and economics at the University of Paris. He was in charge of the administration of the agricultural cooperative society in Toulouse from 1917-1919, returning to Syria in 1920 to be appointed inspector general for agriculture in 1921, followed by a succession of other government positions.\textsuperscript{467} Al-Jaza’iri had a doctorate in political economy, was an inspector for the Syrian government’s ministry of agriculture and had graduated from the agricultural high school in Berlin.\textsuperscript{468}

For the most part these contributors espoused a vision of reform that had its antecedents in processes set in motion in the late Ottoman period: tax reform, cadastral mapping, agrarian credit, advocacy of cooperative societies, and individual property ownership. These were also, except for the emphasis on cooperative societies, among the main ostensible reforms proposed by French officials in the administration. Where these two reform visions diverged, however, was in the processes of their implementation. While Syrian officials stressed the importance of government investment and assistance to support, protect, and increase local production and its consumption, French mandate policies were parsimonious on the question of investment and far more concerned with protecting metropole commercial interests over those of local producers. They also tried to maintain or introduce ties that would make the economies of the areas under mandate increasingly dependent on the metropole.

Moving beyond the more local concerns of the Aleppo Chamber of Commerce, in one of the earliest issues of \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} published in March 1924, Atallah, as head of economic matters in Damascus, laid out a comprehensive vision of what an agricultural politics

\textsuperscript{466} Zakariya, \textit{al-Qura}, 11.
\textsuperscript{467} Faris, \textit{Min Howa fi Suriya}, 298-299.
might look like for all of Syria. He stressed that each “advanced” people had enacted “an economic political plan” according to “its traditions, needs, ills, and deficiencies.” Syria’s government needed to do the same, tailoring an agricultural politic to respond to its particular social, economic, and environmental conditions. Among the primary issues that had held agriculture back in Syria, Atallah identified the lack of knowledge of modern methods, trade agreements between the Ottoman Empire and Western countries, failure to protect local agricultural production from foreign speculation through agricultural unions that would defend fellahin interests, musha’ and “scattered” systems of land tenure, and finally the process of collecting agricultural assets through the taxation methods of a ‘shar and iltizam. The last in particular he noted was subject to natural factors and could not be pursued in just one way by the government—to seek each year to increase taxation would be an injustice to the peasant whose yield fluctuated annually. Government policies should be sensitive to these environmental constraints.

In articulating these policies, Atallah stressed government initiatives to undertake investment, but also reorganize methods of extraction. Modern agricultural methods, trade agreements, and agricultural unions each represented a way for the state to intervene, whether on the local level or as a buffer between the national and the global, to invest in and protect national production. Suggestions for land reform and tax collection were means by which the state would, in turn, streamline its revenue intake. To respond to these issues, Atallah stressed the need to reassess trade covenants, establish an overall agricultural plan, and more specifically pursue an

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471 Atallah, “al-Hala,” Zira’a al-Haditha 1:3 (March 1924): 131-2. Among the “advanced” countries that “had sacrificed special interests in order to secure general interests” he listed as examples “Prussia, Westphalia, Luxembourg, Alsace, Bavaria, Switzerland, Hungary, France and others” (131).
orderly approach to technical education. This last project, he noted, should focus on the establishment of elementary schools and stress practical approaches in model fields or agricultural orphanages without costing farmers and their children anything.⁴⁷³

Juxtaposing this call for free education for farmers and their children with tales of well-off elites who tried to self-educate and pursue “modern” agricultural practices with disastrous results suggests these technocrats’ acknowledgement of and appreciation for the local knowledge of rural communities. Elaborating on the Economic Journal’s discussion of certain elites’ attraction to pursuing modern agricultural practices, Zakariya recounted an anecdote in which a friend, who had been an officer in the army and, needing a way to earn his living after the occupation, rented a farm of “moderate fertility” and turned to agriculture. Believing the “management of cultivators easier than leading battalions,” he bought “modern implements” and “worked…his partners (murabi’) like he had worked his soldiers.”⁴⁷⁴ Plowing and planting “as his conceptions and observations in European books inspired him”—although the majority of this information, Zakariya added, “could not be applied literally in our territories and soil”—the result was a disaster. His machines broke down, his animals became emaciated, he lost his anticipated crop and he ended up straddled with a massive loan.⁴⁷⁵ Zakariya explained that a technical agricultural education was not enough, especially for someone who had lived in the city all their life and could not “distinguish wheat from barley and mules from donkeys.”⁴⁷⁶ The challenges that agriculture presented could be shocking and perplexing and this is what often led those who were initially enthusiastic about working in the countryside to end up looking for jobs

⁴⁷⁶ Zakariya, “Kif yajab,” 424.
in the government. For Zakariya “inclination, cleverness, and knowledge were not enough” in the pursuit of this form of agricultural practice.\textsuperscript{477} New techniques untried in local environments presented challenges, especially to those with no prior knowledge of agriculture. Such an example helps explain not only the technocratic urgency given to providing free education to farming families, but also suggests why many landowners preferred to stick with local fellahin knowledge—while not designated “scientific” or “modern,” it was reliable!

The application of new technologies needed additional testing and experimentation, preferably by farmers already well-versed in local conditions and agricultural practice, much as had been the case in the Aleppo model field. While on the one hand agricultural “progress” for these technocrats required more effective state mediation between the local and the global, investment in educational facilities that would provide opportunities for local knowledge to be applied to new methods was also a key component of the “positive” projects the state should pursue. While such projects had received state support in the late Ottoman era, they would struggle under the mandate as local technocrats and found themselves at odds with French officials and other local elites regarding an “agricultural politics” for the country—the consequences of which I will explore in further detail in the next two chapters.

**Protecting and Investing in Agriculture Under the Mandate: A Local Perspective**

Among local technocrats, a recurrent theme in their discussions amongst themselves as well as in their suggestions to mandate officials was the need for the state to protect and invest in agriculture to nurture the region’s wealth. Many of the contributors to *al-Zira’a al-Haditha* expounded upon a vision for government assistance with references to an array of examples from elsewhere, while critiquing the government’s inaction. Echoing the same sentiments expressed in

\textsuperscript{477} Zakariya, “Kif yajab,” 425.
the Ottoman language *Cultivator* (*Ekinci*) journal some fifteen years earlier, they premised their vision on the notion that agriculture was the root of national economic prosperity and wealth.\(^{478}\) That is, not only was interest in agriculture increasing as other economic options such as commerce, especially in Aleppo, became more limited, even more fundamentally these authors argued that a state-supported agricultural sector would be the basis of thriving industry and commerce.

The journal’s editor opened the December 1928 issue with the following quote: “General well-being resembles the tree, agriculture is its roots and industry and commerce are its branches and leaves. If harm afflicted the roots the leaves fell and the branches withered and the tree died.” Originally from one of the “philosophers of China,” he noted this quote had been used by Jules Méline to conclude his well-known book “The Return to the Land,” published in 1905.\(^{479}\) As discussed the eastern Mediterranean during this period was also experiencing its own form of a return to the land movement. However, according to the editor, while “governments of the west and diligent governments of the east” had followed this philosophy and supported those eager to take up agricultural pursuits, for ten years the Syrian government had neglected its obligations to agriculture and those locally pursuing their own “return to the land” movement. He therefore suggested that the government should look to “the economic laws that governments of the west are pursuing in dealings with their people and to adapt from them what helps it to undertake its obligations to rescue the country from this abyss that reached it because of [its] negligence.”\(^{480}\) Officials had an obligation to develop state-supported agricultural initiatives and, while they

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\(^{478}\) “Şeyden evvel ziraat lazımdır,” *Ekinci* 1:6 (20 Haziran 1329 [3 July 1913]): 41.


\(^{480}\) “al-Zira’a fi al-gharb,” 3.
could look elsewhere for inspiration, Syria’s specific needs would require a process of translation to adapt these policies to local practice.

Quoting Quesnay’s declaration that “agriculture is the source of the riches in the country,” Al-Jaza’iri launched his suggestions for an overarching government plan with reference to the theoretical aspects of Physiocratic philosophy. He insisted that such a statement held particularly true for Syria and would stay so for the foreseeable future due to the region’s lack of subsoil resources necessary for increased industrial activity.481 Noting that while there had been “important, small, individual, personal undertakings” for agricultural reform, “economic success always depends on a complete general plan applied with fundamentals and durability and continuity.”482 Nonetheless within this general plan, he argued, a key component of increasing agricultural abundance was “the social conditions that the farming class enjoys”—namely the proliferation of small property ownership in whose defense he quoted the Physiocrat Mirabeau’s philosophy “that the land is not cultivated when it is characterized with fertility and excellence, but when it is surrounded with justice and freedom.”483

Mustafa al-Shihabi prefaced his remarks to the Scientific Society on the ills of the economy and his suggestions for treating them—largely through government intervention—with a brief introduction that emphasized the importance of wealth and government investment in the current era. In addition to quoting a well-known line of Arabic poetry: “It [money] is the tongue to whom wants eloquence and it is the weapon to whom wants combat,” he also referenced the wisdom of Ibn ‘Arabi who insisted “asceticism cannot be relied on.”484 Since agriculture was the region’s primary resource, it was crucial to effectively administer the technologies of rule that

would ensure its wealth-generating potential. Wealth, and the state’s ability to generate it through a well-managed economy, were crucial to competing globally.

For Syrian technocrats, producing this wealth and ensuring this prosperity required various government programs that would on the one hand seek to restructure extraction while also providing state-centered investment. In what follows and chapter 4, I will focus on the methods of investment suggested and how these contrasted with French approaches to implementation. In chapter five I will consider divergent proposals for extraction and the consequences of practice. Given the implications of new customs barriers and the space redefined by the borders eventually delimited in the region post-World War I, local technocrats asserted the need to carve out a protected space for local agricultural production and associated industries, which constituted 90% of Syria’s exports.485 Wary of the exploitation colonial relationships exerted on the economy of the colony, they stressed the need to undertake projects for local self-sufficiency, responsible spending and investment that, they argued, did not primarily exploit—policies they considered could be best enacted and protected through cooperative enterprises and a reliance on technocratic expertise.

Al-Shihabi in particular was adamant about the need to pursue greater self-sufficiency. He noted that between 1920 and 1925 exports had been brought closer to imports, but that the ratio was still not as good as it had been before the war when imports were only two times as much as exports.486 Seeking areas where Bilad al-Sham could reduce its dependence on foreign products, he singled out sugar imports, potatoes and wheat, and products made from Syrian-produced wool and leather or fruit products that could be made from the products of the Ghouta around Damascus. According to his calculations, there were vast swaths of land in the Ghouta,

486 Al-Shihabi, “Ma jad min,” 245.
for example, that were well-suited to sugar beet cultivation— all that was necessary were multiple sugar factories to process them. Furthermore the region was “a land of grain and potatoes” and the Ghouta was ideal for growing most tree fruits that could be transformed into jams.  

He also critiqued local dependence on French factories for dyeing silk. This reliance on French industry hurt local industry even in technically local markets because of the mandate’s customs regime. Since pure Lebanese silks were sent to Lyon to be dyed, when they were exported to Palestine, the mandate government assessed customs dues as if they were primarily foreign-produced goods when in fact the only thing foreign about them was the dye. The result, al-Shihabi calculated, was a 14,400-14,600 gold lira loss for the local silk factory. A simple solution he suggested would be to establish a local dye factory, which would only cost 20-30,000 gold Ottoman liras instead of paying 10,000 lira to the factory in Lyon each year to dye “national products.” Of course the establishment of such a factory would presumably run counter to the interests of supporters of the mandate in Syria and Lebanon who had close ties with the commercial interests of Lyon and Marseille.

Al-Shihabi was quite explicit regarding the implications of maintaining this reliance— such a relationship was just one example of the ways in which the colonizer preserved the colony’s dependence on it. Colonial politics, he concluded, relied on monopolizing the products of the colonized country with the merchants of the colonizer and its debts with the products of the colonizer. The ultimate goal then was to struggle to achieve economic as well as political independence. Thus the government needed to take measures to encourage and expand local

487 Al-Shihabi, “Ma jad,” 247.  
488 Al-Shihabi, “Ma jad,” 249-250.  
490 Khoury, Syria, 31, 38.  
production as well as consumption and reduce its dependence on foreign concerns for processing its natural resources. He noted that a law passed by the Ottoman government in January 1913 had instituted a number of measures to protect and facilitate the growth of “national industries,” but under the mandate, customs tariffs had reached 25% of the price of most raw and industrial materials. Among other measures, the Chamber of Commerce had finally passed a decision in June 1928 to lower the tariff on goods like synthetic and natural silk yarn and wool from 25% to 11%, taking tariffs back to what had existed at the end of the Ottoman period. However, he insisted that the government needed a “bigger will to make sacrifices,” suggesting the amount imposed on some products was still high and not necessary for “the protection of national industries.” 493 In conclusion, he suggested that it was “necessary to lower them to half or remove that tax completely like the Palestine government had done.” 494

While the consequences of these new borders and the imposed tariffs frustrated technocratic plans for the region’s economic independence, especially as it related to the region’s agricultural production and industry, internal developments also frustrated these technocratic experts who were upset by the lack of government investment and reliance on local technical expertise. Termanini insisted that the government needed to rely on “the masters of opinion and science in the agriculture of the country and its economy in the way that they see it appropriate.” 495 In particular, he critiqued what he considered the inadequate spending of the government on agricultural matters, noting that out of no less than 20 million gold dinars spent in a land of three million people only 500,000 gold lira had gone to agriculture and this had been primarily to pay employees’ salaries and fight pests—a duty that was among the “negative” works of the administration, i.e. the things the government was expected to do just to keep

493 Al-Shihabi, “Ma jad 2,” 298-299  
494 Al-Shihabi, “Ma jad 2,” 299.  
farmers suffering extensive damage. Al-Shihabi meanwhile suggested it was strange that a wealthy country like French had not pursued greater investments especially when Syria was in such need of irrigation and agricultural companies.

At the same time, one area in which French concerns had invested—agrarian credit—would become a key point of critique. Al-Jaza’iri stressed the need for long terms and appropriate interest, adding that while it could help peasants buy land, the government needed to ensure legislation was in place to ban the selling of lots of less than 100 dönüms, which he compared to the five feddan law in Egypt. Termanini, highly critical of “this abyss that has befallen [the country] due to the negligence of the government…for these ten years,” compared the “treatments” the government offered in the form of agrarian credit at 9-11% interest to an “anesthetic drug” that strained the fellah with its extreme demands. In contrast, foreign banks did not take more than 6-7% interest. However, as al-Shihabi noted, the agricultural bank in Syria had been capitalized by the Tunisia bank—presumably this is a reference to the Crédit Foncier de Algérie et de Tunisie—whose money had been guaranteed by the treasury (bayt al-mal), but which had only been willing to loan at 9% interest. As a result the agricultural bank needed to take 10% in order to have 1% to cover its fees. This rate, combined with other expenses, meant that the total amount could reach 12%—a rate not warranted by the meager profits of agriculture. While these technocrats did not question the necessity of an agricultural bank, they proposed that it needed to operate at terms more suitable to the return rate of agricultural production.

496 “Siyasatna al-Zira’iya,” 2.
In order to respond to these issues and work towards these goals, the need for “a spirit of cooperation” and in particular the formation of agricultural societies or unions to advise and protect farmer interests was a frequent suggestion.\footnote{Atallah, “al-Hala al-Zirai’ya wa al-‘iqtisadiya fi Suriya,” \textit{Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:3 (March 1924): 131.} Termanini noted that if even in autocracies the government relied on the opinions of scientific experts, how much more should a “government from the spirit of the represented people” rely on local and representative councils for plans, laws and organization regarding “scientific matters.”\footnote{“Siyasatna al-Zira’iya,” \textit{Zira’a al-Haditha} 4:2 (April 1928): 2.} For Ahdab agricultural unions were a means to protect the interests of landowners and give them leverage to fight high taxes and other catastrophes which had affected them in recent years. He also suggested these unions could facilitate the preservation of both the \textit{fellahin} and landowners’ rights.\footnote{Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Taqqaddum al-Zira’a wa Tariqa istithmar aradhi fi Suriya,” \textit{Zira’a al-Haditha} 4:2 (April 1928): 2.} The question of how to manage the relationship between landowners and peasants was particularly complex but also urgent as these technocrats insisted on the need for increasing small property ownership, but also sought a way to go about it that would not too greatly disrupt relations between peasants and landowners. The key, as with the rest of their proposals for various government strategies aimed at a strong economic plan for agricultural development, was to find a method that would suit the particularities of the Syrian situation.

**Agricultural Exploitation, the Mandate, and the Politics of Empire**

French officials saw the agricultural exploitation of the region rather differently. In the final section of the chapter, I will look at the priorities articulated by French proponents of the mandate and its administrators as they made their case for the mandate’s value to the French empire primarily based on the agricultural raw materials it would provide. In Paris, enthusiasm
for the mandate was by no means unanimous. Rather, commercial concerns based out of Lyon and Marseille who had interests in certain goods and enterprises in the region, such as silk, were its primary supporters. One team of academic experts primarily from Marseille and Lyon traveled to the region and then published the work, *Que vaut la Syrie*, which assessed its value to the empire based on their first-hand observations.\(^{505}\) The mandate’s proponents used the aftermath of the war, and in particular the reliance on industry and requisite raw materials the war had exposed and necessitated, to justify incorporating into the empire additional regions that could supply key raw materials and thereby decrease the “financial sacrifices” France would have to make in the future.\(^{506}\)

Several publications made the case for the riches that Syria would bring France. In addition to *Que vaut la Syrie*, *La Syrie et la France* by Carl and Paul Roederer, framed the argument in relation to France’s historical and cultural “influence” in the region. Published as part of a series entitled “Les Grands Problèmes Coloniaux,” which had been inspired by England’s attempt to make its own systematic inventory of colonial resources, their treatise ultimately gets around to the crux of its argument: the economic and strategic significance of Syria to France.\(^{507}\) On the one hand the region served as an important supplier of certain goods—the authors contended that in addition to silk, over half of Syria’s wool, oil, fruits, and sponges were exported to France and, on the other, it was an important market for French goods, especially silk. Ports, roads, railroads, tramways, and lighting in the region had been done by French companies and with French capital.\(^{508}\) The fact that no other European country had a

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\(^{505}\) See Paul Huvelin, *Que vaut la Syrie*? (Paris: Comité de l'Asie française, 1921), 6. The group consisted of professors, lawyers, agronomists, merchants, and other technical experts. See also Khoury, *Syria*, 31, 38, 51.


\(^{507}\) Roederer, *La Syrie*, xix.

\(^{508}\) Roederer, *La Syrie*, 53-54
railroad in the region was yet further justification. But despite all these French interests in the region, opponents apparently continued to insist that Syria would not pay for the “political, military, and financial effort of France” in the region. Its supporters however contended that not only would it, but that it would do so very rapidly. At the core of the Roederers’ argument was the largely untapped richness of its agricultural production. At times their assessments seemed rather skewed by their perceptions of Ottoman administration and their assumptions about their own contrasting diligence. Roederer asserted that based on a 1914 presentation of official statistics the six provinces that composed Bilad al-Sham had a total revenue of 75 million and expenses of only 38 million, meaning that they ran a surplus of 37 million. Certain that this figure represented a surplus even given what he characterized as the “corrupt practices” of Ottoman officials and “all the embezzling inherent to the Turkish administration,” he was sure that “in the hands of scrupulous administration, the results would surpass the most audacious projections.” It was an ironic conclusion given the financial travails of the mandate years and frequent complaints about bloated budgets.

Philippe Berthelot, who Millerand’s relatively colonial-friendly government would designated as the secretary general in Paris in 1920, made the connection between French raw material needs and Syrian agriculture most explicitly. Cotton and cereals were, he explained, “the two essential elements of Syria’s prosperity…that is to say, the two raw materials of

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509 Roederer, *La Syrie*, 56. Apparently, the French had been annoyed when the Ottoman government chose a German company to build the trans-Anatolia railroad that would eventually reach Baghdad (William I. Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon 1900-1914* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1976), 140). But it was not only foreign concerns they felt threatened their interests. When the Ottoman government decided to build the Hijaz railway, a section of which from Damascus to Dera’a (in the Hawran) would compete with the French line from Damascus to Muzerib (also in the Hawran), they demanded compensation and, after “acrimonious” negotiations, managed to get a concession to extend the Damascus-Hama line to Aleppo, as well as any compensation for the losses to the competing line (Shorrock, *French Imperialism*, 147-148).


511 Roederer, *La Syrie*, 91.
primordial necessity which France lacks and which the abundant production of would permit it on the one hand to liberate one of our principle industries from foreign markets and on the other hand fill out its own production in conditions much less onerous than present conditions.”

That is, France’s particular resource needs defined Syria’s prosperity. It should be noted that he penned this when French officials thought they could still maintain control of Cilicia, a major center of cotton production in southern Anatolia. Nonetheless, they were also highly optimistic about the cultivation possibilities in northern Syria, most particularly along the banks of the Orontes and Euphrates rivers, which “give the same facilities of culture as the atmospheric condensations of Cilicia” while the plain in Antakya contained 300,000 hectares for cotton cultivation. Grain production meanwhile, even with current “rudimentary” methods, far surpassed local consumption, but with dry-farming, which Berthelot identified as an American process, the future held “unknown” possibilities.

Despite certain long-term commercial relationships and high expectations for the region’s agricultural production, there are suggestions that French colonial knowledge of the state of agriculture in the region was off to a shaky start. Not only did they consistently characterize local agricultural methods as unchanged since ancient times, but even the map initially used to assess the extent of agricultural production in the region appears not to have included areas that had been part of expanded cultivation efforts under the Ottomans since at least the first decade of the 20th century. In April 1920, M. Achard, the man who would become the Agriculture Counselor under the mandate, submitted a report describing the state of agriculture in the region of Aleppo and noted that “the map shows extended ‘white areas’,,” which would seem to indicate

the desert started immediately east of the Aleppo-Hama railway line, but that this was in fact “an
error.” Rather, he noted that “a recent exploration” had disclosed wheat and barley cultivation as
far as Maskana, neighboring the Euphrates.\textsuperscript{516} This would seem to reference cultivation on farms
that had been part of the sultan’s estates, which then became state lands held by the treasury after
the 1908 revolution.\textsuperscript{517} He observed that in these areas despite lower levels of rainfall, the
“Arab” with “primitive instruments and rudimentary methods of working can draw from the soil
a product remunerating his effort,” but insisted that “European agriculture having the materials
and perfected methods of ‘dry farming’” would make it even more productive.\textsuperscript{518} Tellingly,
Achard appears to distinguish “dry farming” as a concept and scientific approach to farming as
distinct from local practice, which was unchanging and ancient. For local technocrats this story
was rather more complex as I will discuss in chapter four. He also suggested that introducing
cultivation done by “mechanical traction would compensate…for the poverty of the population”
by increasing their capacity for export, presumably in no small part to France.\textsuperscript{519}

The promises of mechanized equipment seem to have rather bedazzled French officials.
The Foire Exhibition organized by mandate administrators in 1921 in Beirut was an opportunity
to not only display all the French goods that they hoped could now be given prime of place in the
Syrian market, but also to demonstrate the benefits of French agricultural machines.\textsuperscript{520} However,
because of American objections at San Remo to any mandate power using economic policies in a
mandate solely for its benefit, Berthelot noted that there could be no obstacles placed in the way

\textsuperscript{516} MAE, Syrie-Liban 60, “Valeur Agricole de la Partie Septentrionale de la Syrie,” note from Achard, 17 April
1920. It is not clear what map he is referring to exactly, but it seems to be something officials were using in Paris to
get a sense of the areas under cultivation in the region.
\textsuperscript{517} Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiyya 2” Zira’a al-Haditha 4:2 (December 1928): 30.
\textsuperscript{518} MAE, Syrie-Liban 60, “Valeur Agricole de la Partie Septentrionale de la Syrie,” note from Achard, 17 April
1920.
\textsuperscript{519} MAE, Syrie-Liban 60, “Valeur Agricole de la Partie Septentrionale de la Syrie,” note from Achard, 17 April
1920, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{520} See Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, La Syrie et le Liban en 1921: La Foire-
of foreign concerns exhibiting at the fair. Nonetheless in the final catalogue of exhibitors, France businesses would far surpass their foreign competitors in numbers. In contrast to the diversity of farm equipment that had been available for exhibition and demonstration in the late Ottoman period only Case tractors from the United States and a number of French agricultural concerns participated.

Interestingly, despite these attempts to privilege French concerns, it appears that French manufacturers were somewhat reluctant to get involved in the local market. Robert de Caix, secretary-general in the mandate administration until 1924 and a key figure in the colonial party, had to write a letter to the Minister of Foreign Affairs urging him to encourage French companies to get involved. He even suggested that landowners in the north were willing to give their lands over to a company to cultivate and raised the specter of English competition if French ones did not take advantage. Meanwhile, the question of arranging demonstrations of tractors displayed at the Foire proved a vexed one. Since the fair was being held in Beirut, all relatively close areas, such as the Biqa‘ or Akkar near Tripoli, would require special transportation arrangements. Neither of these places were part of the region around Aleppo, where it seems the market was considered strongest, nor were they precisely representative of its ecology, although de Caix opined that Akkar would be the closest approximate. The entrenchment of French rule in Beirut and surrounding areas and the preference given to this region for events like the Foire

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521 MAE, Syrie-Liban 60, Berthelot to the High Commission, 6 January 1921.
522 Haut-Commissariat, *La Syrie et le Liban en 1921*, 315-332. Fourteen pages were devoted to listing the French participants in the exhibition, two to Syrian products (including cheese from the Selemiye school), and two pages for all foreign participants.
524 MAE, Syrie-Liban 75, de Caix to Kammerer, 5 November 1920; Khoury, *Syrie*, 73-74. De Caix insisted the promise of the market was “very big”—M. Achard estimated that while a fifth of Aleppo was under cultivation three-fourths of it could be. In another communication he stated even more explicitly, “French industry must be able to provide the necessary agricultural material for Syria and I would not be disposed to favor the introduction of machines from foreign marks” de Caix to Beirut, 24 December 1920.
meant that the lands where French officials’ key agricultural ambitions were supposed to be fulfilled remained too far afield for easily accessible exploitation or demonstration.

If French investment in the region in the form of agricultural implements was less than satisfactory and exposed to stiff competition, inflows of French capital through banking institutions proved somewhat more successful even as investment in the form of agrarian credit posed particular problems. As discussed above local technocrats were adamant about the need for credit for farmers but balked at the rates charged under the mandate. While I will examine more closely the consequences of this arrangement in chapter five, here I would briefly like to trace the considerations and negotiations that framed the establishment of agricultural credit under the mandate to provide a sense of the stipulations and interests involved. In August 1917, M. Moussalli, a Beirut merchant based in Geneva representing the “Syrian Syndicat” wrote to the French consul at Lausanne to urge the establishment of a Syrian crédit foncier after the war. In addition to citing the soil’s fertility and the profits that could be made thereof as an enticement, he also claimed the earlier ripening of crops due to Syria’s climate would mean it never lacked for (presumably foreign) markets.526

After the war, moves were made to consolidate the various banking concerns in the region and French sources of capital were eager to establish or increase their presence.527 The Imperial Ottoman Bank became la Banque de Syrie, capitalized at 10 million francs with a statute deposited in Paris on 26 December 1918.528 Also in December 1918, the director general of the Société General expressed an interest in opening a bank in Syria which could receive support from the Beirut branch of the Banque de Salonique and could be capitalized with

527 Interestingly, the Crédit Lyonnais does not seem to have been among them. In the Levant it only had branches in Jaffa and Jerusalem, both of which came under British mandate (Issawi, The Fertile Crescent, 1800-1914, 410).
5,000,000 francs. The bank was constituted by April 1919 and by October Le Crédit Foncier d’Algérie et de Tunisie (CFAT) was supporting it financially and controlling its operations. Not too long afterwards, a Société Foncier de Syrie was established as an affiliate of Banque Française d’Egypte with the intent of the “acquisition and mise en valeur of lands.” Its initial capital was 10 million francs but in November 1919 it requested permission to increase it to 20 million because, even though it had no intention of going public, it had received the adherence of an important Syrian group and to satisfy them it indicated that it needed to increase its capital. By 19 January 1921, CFAT had acquired it as well. The Crédit Foncier de Syrie had 50 million francs put at the disposal of CFAT to be used for mortgage transactions in Syria, Ottoman Empire, Salonika and Izmir.

While these banks were eager to get into the mortgage business there seems to have been a particular concern related to the Ottoman law of 1913 (25 February 1328) which still, at least during the early years of the mandate, governed mortgages in Syria and specified that “assets, real estate can be given as mortgage to societies or banks authorized by the government to consent advances on built property or lands, but these societies and banks cannot possess the said real estate à titre definitive.” These terms seem to have been a potential deal-breaker for CFAT and CFS which demanded clarification of what this clause in particular meant, suggesting that “it could be stipulated that assets put up for sale in case of non-payment could be acquired by the two societies or by one of them.”

In 1927 or 1928 an arrêté seems to have been promulgated that reassured these banks.

Regarding loans to small cultivators, while the Crédit Foncier de Syrie and CFAT insisted they

529 MAE, Syrie-Liban 71, M. Homberg to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 6 December 1918.
530 MAE, Syrie-Liban 71, President of the Counsel to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 19? October 1919.
531 MAE, Syrie-Liban 71, Banque Française d’Egypte to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 11 November 1919.
532 MAE, Syrie-Liban 72, Director of the Counsel of CFAT to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 19 January 1921.
533 MAE, Syrie-Liban 72, CFAT to the High Commissioner, 24 June 1921.
were not in a position to undertake these kinds of operations, they did indicate that were these
loans made through the intermediary of the agricultural banks they “would strongly encourage
them.” They would do this because they considered “the operations that would contribute the
most fully to increase the economic wealth of the country would be credit easily distributed to
small indigenous property owners to ameliorate their agricultural installations.”

Around the same time the Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban suggested that it too could get in on the action.
While noting that it was not in a position itself to make loans as it could only negotiate titles of
credit for less than three months and “the advances required by the work of the soil” generally
needed nine months, it could nonetheless give the agricultural banks “capital of a significance”
on the condition that these funds would be “judiciously employed” as it considered agricultural
banks’ current mode of operation “left much to be desired.” While seeking to infuse the
countryside with their capital, these banks also attempted to establish a significant distance
between themselves and the small proprietor through the intermediary of the state-guaranteed
agricultural bank. Meanwhile, local technocrats decried their exorbitant rates as ultimately not
all that helpful to the small cultivator in the first place.

Conclusion

World War I and its aftermath represented a significant change in the agricultural
administration of Bilad al-Sham. Cut off from its northern hinterland and with administrative and

534 MAE, Syrie-Liban 330, President of CFAT to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 10 February 1928. The letter notes
that there was an arrêté issued just prior to this that the President felt would “permit the resumption and
intensification of our operations in Syria” regarding mortgages, in which the bank did plan to engage. Himadeh also
notes that while CFAT was established in 1921, it did not start lending on mortgages until April 1928, but he doesn’t
explain the reason for it (Himadeh, Economic Organization, 310).
535 MAE, Syrie-Liban 331, Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 December
1927.
536 MAE, Syrie-Liban 331, Banque de Syrie et du Grand Liban to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 29 December
1927.
customs boundaries crisscrossing it to serve British and French imperial interests, these changes redefined the environment in which local technocrats envisioned the agricultural management of local resources. In doing so, they would also have to contend with competing French priorities. Detached from the Ottoman imperial sphere, local technocrats sought to re-conceptualize how this space should be administered by the state to further the wealth of a smaller political/national space. Meanwhile, French officials and proponents of the mandate eyed the region and its environment for what it could provide in terms of basic raw materials for the metropole. Certain French industrial and commercial concerns had specific interests in the region that they wanted to maintain and further exploit and the mandate provided an apt means of achieving this. However, the more general framework in which the mandate’s supporters urged its significance before the central government and general public capitalized on a sense of national and imperial vulnerability in France in the wake of the war and therefore used the argument of the imperial self-sufficiency the mandate would provide. Building on an array of commercial relationships and French-capitalized endeavors already well-entrenched in the Levant, its proponents argued that the region had a prosperous future that would serve French interests.

Despite the divergent perspectives of local technocrats and French mandate advocates, there was continuity in their ideas about the importance of scientific, or modern, agricultural practice and, at least rhetorically, the general technologies of rule through which that practice needed to be administered. This continuity reflected their participation in the networks that had been circulating ideas about the strategies of rule necessary to respond to the exigencies of these new forms of agricultural practice, networks that predated the war and had involved Ottoman, Syrian, French and other actors. However, it was in actual administrative practice and implementation of these technologies under the mandate that their ideas diverged, leading to
rising tensions over the course of the interwar years. It is this historical process that I will explore in greater detail in the final two chapters.
Chapter 4

Educating the Fellah?: Technical Education, Agricultural Expertise, and the Question of Rural Influence under the French Mandate

The era of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon represented a different political context for asserting claims to scientific expertise, for building institutional infrastructure dedicated to its practice and for elaborating the policies of economic and social transformation through which the state or the empire would reap its perceived benefits. Approaches to “scientific,” or increasingly what was deemed “modern,” agricultural practice featured prominently in proposals and planning for imperial and national prosperity in Syria during the mandate, where agriculture and its industrial products continued to be the backbone of the economy. As during the Ottoman period, despite these techniques’ indebtedness to existing practices of agricultural communities, the discourse about the expertise they represented tended to portray them as distinct and different. However, the mandate as a political and economic space differentially mediated the relationships not only between peasants, farmers, local elites and the state but also between local technocrats and the global sphere. It enclosed the region in borders that isolated it from agriculture-related institutional changes occurring in the Turkish Republic to the north and those unfolding under the British mandates to the south, while also providing grounds for tariffs on agricultural products crossing them. 537

On the local level, nationalist technocrats considered their capacity to disseminate scientific agricultural knowledge a key aspect of economic development, which necessitated special schools and programs to facilitate its penetration of rural communities. French officials

537 See Norman Burns, The Tariff of Syria, 1919-1932 (Beirut: American Press, 1933). It should be noted that although the region was no longer administered as a coherent unit, technocrats in Syria were certainly aware of developments in Palestine and Anatolia and these at times served as points of comparison with French mandate policies—a point that will be touched on further below.
on the other hand, despite their rhetoric of encouraging scientific agricultural methods, limited their support primarily to French concerns, often thwarting local initiatives to experiment. Furthermore, on the global level, the interaction with international networks that had been encouraged and facilitated by Ottoman policies seems to have become a source of suspicion and tension under the mandate as officials emphasized economic links and ties of expertise with the metropole above all else. The possibility that cooperation with other national entities, something French officials could not deny under the League of Nation’s mandate framework, would lead to influential penetration in rural areas served as a source of concern.

Thus the mandate provided a space in which internationally shared standards of scientific agricultural expertise could be variously deployed by different actors to stake claims to distinct visions for economic development in the region. From a nationalist framework to a conception of imperial tutelage to insistence on philanthropic intervention these actors envisioned their projects according to distinct imaginaries of the circulations of knowledge that had produced this expertise, imaginaries which in turn shaped how each considered this expertise could best be translated and applied to rural communities. Tracing the fate of educational infrastructure related to agriculture over the course of the mandate, especially of those institutions with an Ottoman legacy, demonstrates the effects of mandate politics on institution-building (or lack thereof).

As Khoury has discussed in detail, the French administration of mandate Syria was a cumbersome and expensive apparatus that tended more often than not to stifle local initiative.538 This chapter and the following one are attempts to demonstrate the implications and impact of that administration for rural areas especially in so much as it pertained to the sphere of agriculture--one of the mandate’s supposedly prioritized areas for development. In tracing the

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administrative ineptitude that seems to have characterized mandate approaches to managing affairs in the agricultural sphere, the following two chapters will attempt to provide a more nuanced perspective on the dynamics that impacted rural life, which until now have primarily only found greater elaboration for the period of the 1925-1927 Syrian Revolt.  

I aim to illuminate the role and impact of intermediaries who operated between urban and rural spheres and incorporate the rural experience of mandate rule into existing narratives about the mandate’s implementation and nationalist mobilization, aspects that have thus far been largely absent in the literature.

In detailing the impacts of mandate policies on the rural sphere and juxtaposing this with the infrastructure and institution-building discussed under Ottoman rule, I aim to provide a fresh perspective on the dynamics of mandate infrastructure building, especially in rural areas. I trace the disruption of infrastructure developed under the Ottoman period, while demonstrating the frustration of elite local initiatives related to rural development, which had tended to be supported in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter examines these changes by returning to the question of agricultural expertise and tracing how the institutionalization of infrastructure related to knowledge production about scientific agriculture fared over the course of the mandate. I will begin by tracing different technocrats’ conceptions of how this expertise circulated and then examine the role these played in the elaboration of divergent visions of economic development for the mandate versus the metropole. I will then demonstrate how these perspectives played out in terms of institutional development in the mandate’s unique space.

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These circulations of knowledge and the institutional infrastructure and discursive frameworks that accompanied them produced a number of effects. Most fundamentally they privileged certain forms of agricultural expertise over others as representative of progress and rationality. They also encouraged the forging of connections between urban and rural areas. Within the context of the mandate and its distinct framework of governance, however, these impacts had additional repercussions. The privileging of “scientific” expertise became a means of reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge between the metropole and the mandate and reinscribing them institutionally. Local experts, themselves participants in these international networks of expertise, found their perspectives marginalized by the hierarchical structure of mandate rule and institutional arrangements that privileged the mandate’s priorities over that of local technocrats. The unidirectional nature of expertise posited by this vision also obscured the multidirectional nature of its circulation. Meanwhile, the links facilitated between urban areas and the countryside took on additional significance since mandate officials viewed them as potential vectors whereby Syrian nationalism, French interests, or another foreign influence could penetrate rural areas. In particular, within the internationalized mandate system, this expertise and the technologies associated with it represented opportunities for competitive, new markets and, in contrast to the exclusive parameters of previous colonial governance, under the League of Nations other “nations” could compete.

Imperial Interests and Hierarchies of Expertise

Mandate officials’ plans for the local mise en valeur of the mandate states ostensibly prioritized applying new technologies and cultivating the expertise considered requisite for their implementation. Scientific agriculture’s frequent centrality to the rhetoric used to justify mandate
rule derived from a three-pronged vision of its role under the mandate—French control of the mandate would ensure the privileging of French commercial interests associated with the new technologies of scientific agriculture, it would reinforce this market by making local expertise reliant on a hierarchy of expertise based in French institutions, and it would encourage the cultivation of products along lines favorable to French industrial concerns. It was a vision that would become a source of intense contestation from local proponents of scientific agriculture while also engendering wariness on the part of French officials of any foreign initiatives that also presaged an interest in these sectors. Attempts to mediate access to international networks of expertise and to manage its application at the local level thus became tools of mandate control.

From the beginning of the mandate, administrators were anxious to facilitate the introduction of French agricultural technology into the region. They considered the agricultural machinery market to be a particularly profitable one for the future—a view that does not appear to have been limited to French officials. Concern was rife that foreign educational institutions would use their pedagogical programs to seduce young farmers-in-training with expertise related to equipment from non-French manufacturers. The Director of the French School for Engineers in Beirut expressed consternation at the competition posed by a new American professional primary school in Saida, Lebanon. Among its ten buildings, he noted was “a garage for automobiles, a workshop for mechanical repairs indicating clearly the orientation of the education and the pursued goal:…American machines, American tools, all for favoring American exportation: in five or six years there will be two or three hundred adults familiar with American machines,” including tractors and agricultural machines. The loss in income to French

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542 MAE, Syrie-Liban 61, “Motoculture,” 68.
concerns, he literally underlined, would be enormous.⁵⁴³ At the Foire-Exposition held in Beirut from April to May 1921, General Gouraud, the first High Commissioner, was so intent that attendees should take note of the fair’s agricultural technology exhibit, he included a special reference to it in his remarks at the opening ceremonies. Invoking the “granary of Rome” image to conjure the area’s lapsed fertility, he assured the assembled that not only would French technology hasten recovery from the devastation of the recent war, but it would make Syria even more fertile than it had been under the Romans due to the “powerful weapon” of motoculture.⁵⁴⁴

French merchants vigorously pursued a policy of introducing farm machinery in the first few years of the mandate—they demonstrated French tractors, which they imported with the support of the government, and “loaned [them] to the land owners for experiment purposes.”⁵⁴⁵ Gaining a corner on the agricultural machinery market was a complicated process however. Local farmers, the Agricultural Counselor M. Achard noted, wanted to observe new machines’ utility demonstrated over the course of a year before making decisions about their effectiveness. Interested manufacturers would also need to establish a depot of spare parts and repair stations—more complicated machines required more complex infrastructures.⁵⁴⁶ Already, he warned, an American manufacturer was planning to establish an agent in Aleppo, Damascus, and Tripoli, and later in Homs and Hama, giving them a leg up in the commercial struggle (lutte commerciale) over a good French company (bonne firme française) due to lack of an agent and

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⁵⁴³ CADN)/Syrie-Liban/2, 7, “Professional education of boys and the economic development of Syria,” 7 November 1921.
⁵⁴⁵ USNA, RG 166, FAS Box 473, “Market for Tractors, Tractor Attachments and Implements,” Aleppo Consulate to the Department of State, 1 November 1924, p.15. This report from the U.S. Foreign Agricultural Service indicates that “With reference to tractors and farm machinery, the French authorities entered the country, it appears, with the intention to follow the most exclusive policy” (15)
tools.\textsuperscript{547} Mandate officials apparently tried to forestall the effects of these encroachments on the market by halting the importation of any foreign equipment until its French equivalent had already arrived.\textsuperscript{548} Despite these efforts, local farmers were apparently unimpressed by the machines’ high prices.\textsuperscript{549} The fact that a machine demonstrated in Aleppo got stuck in the mud, according to one British report, did not help matters.\textsuperscript{550} By 1924, because the machines “did not prove satisfactory in operation,” French merchants apparently began to lose interest, while mandate authorities, eager not to lose the revenue they foresaw generated by these new technologies, had “a complete change in…attitude” and began to encourage imports from elsewhere.\textsuperscript{551}

If tractor markets were not the most promising, restructuring the region institutionally for technical expertise production provided another way to support metropole industries, although at the cost of undermining local desires for infrastructure. While one mandate report insisted that there was little demand for agricultural education, another noted that, despite the damage suffered by the Aleppo model field and the Selimiye agricultural school during the war and the “weak” rebuilding effort undertaken on the Selimiye one by 1922, it “attracted students from diverse parts of Syria as well as Palestine.”\textsuperscript{552} Clearly there was demand from certain groups in

\textsuperscript{547} MAE, Syrie-Liban 61, “Bulletin économique no. 8,” February 1921, 69.
\textsuperscript{548} UKNA, FO 861.72, “Report on the Situation in Aleppo and District,” 15 February 1921.
\textsuperscript{549} MAE, Syrie-Liban 61, “Bulletin économique no. 8,” February 1921, 68.
\textsuperscript{551} USNA, RG 166, FAS Box 473, “Market for Tractors, Tractor Attachments and Implements,” Aleppo Consulate to the Department of State, 1 November 1924, 15. 16. The report noted that in 1924 there were sixteen tractors in the Aleppo district all of American make (15). A mandate report from 1922 even acknowledged that this skepticism was due to the fact that the majority of the imported machines were unsuited to local conditions. Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, La Syrie et le Liban en 1922 (Paris: Emile Larose, 1922), 211. Planners had cautioned that the imported \textit{motoculture} should be “carefully adapted to the variety of local conditions” and that without trained technicians and well-dispersed repair facilities results would be disappointing (19).
\textsuperscript{552} Achard, “La Syrie Pays d’Agriculture,” 166; Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban en 1922, 236-7. Its curriculum; however, was faulted for being too book-oriented and not practical enough.
society, but what they expected from this education and what the mandate wanted to produce from it might explain what could be read as a discrepancy in the reports.

Mandate officials had particular plans for what had been, according to Ottoman classifications, the practical agricultural school in Muslimiya near Aleppo and the Selemiye farm school southeast of Hama. In addition to establishing practical classes for training in equipment use and for managing and driving tractors in Aleppo by 1922, by 1925, they had converted the school at Muslimiya into the Foch Orphanage with an emphasis on agricultural education. At Selemiye, they created an experimental center and announced that it would become the sole general School of Agriculture in Syria and all agricultural education resources would be consolidated there. A perceived lack of technicians and “young people likely to fruitfully pursue technical studies of an advanced level” instead of spurring the expansion of technical education, justified minimizing its institutional presence. Besides without widespread property reform, mandate logic went, what was the use in educating a farmer who did not possess land (in the private property ownership sense) to which he could apply the knowledge he gained?

Instead, the mandate administration focused its resources for technical knowledge production in another type of institution—experimental centers like the Selemiye one. As Daniel Headrick has observed experimental stations tended to be largely geared towards the

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553 “Ziraat Nezaretince şimdiye kadar vücuda getirilen ve getirilmesi mutasavver olan mü’essesat zira’iye,” Ticaret ve Ziraat Nezareti Mecmuası [Commerce and Agriculture Ministry Review], 13 March 1911, 337-345.
555 Achard, “La Syrie,” 165-166; Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban en 1922, 237. Selemiye was an important grain-growing region. The other school was in Muslimiya.
556 Achard, “La Syrie,” 165-166.
557 Achard, “La Syrie,” 164.
558 Achard, “La Syrie,” 166-167; Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban en 1922, 137.
production of knowledge for European consumption.\textsuperscript{559} Certainly, the research priorities of these centers with their emphasis on experiments related to cotton cultivation seem to have been more directed at serving metropole commercial interests than at trying to provide comprehensive information to farmers generally. Such an “education” worked on two levels—on the one hand it sought to “socialize” Syrians to the priorities of mandate rule and officials’ desire to reorient Syria’s productive forces, on the other, it catered to the establishment of hierarchies of knowledge transmission whose most immediate goal was to benefit French commercial interests.\textsuperscript{560} By 1922, five different experimental stations were in the process of being established—two in Lebanon, one in the state of Aleppo, one in Damascus, and one in the ‘Alawite territory.\textsuperscript{561} Immediate priorities for expertise production appeared to focus on the needs of the metropole.

\textbf{Defining Scientific Agricultural Expertise}

Despite this initial emphasis, a somewhat more comprehensive plan for disseminating agricultural expertise was in the works. In 1923 M. Beriel, the counselor for professional education of Greater Lebanon, was appointed the mandate’s counselor for technical education and tasked with drawing up a proposal for the region’s professional education.\textsuperscript{562} His prior experience in Tunisia had been based on a “farm school with experimental laboratory” and a prosperous colon-owned establishment where “the proceeds of the farm paid for the school, the

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\textsuperscript{560} Manu Goswami, \textit{Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space} (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), 132. I borrow the concept of “socializing” used here from Goswami’s discussion of it in colonial India.

\textsuperscript{561} Ministère des affaires étrangères, \textit{Rapport à la société des nations}, 1923, 52.

\textsuperscript{562} CADN/Syrie-Liban/3 Direction du personnel, box 5, folder “Achard,” High Commissioner to Soubhi Bey Barakat, 4 November 1922; CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 27, “Enseignement technique et professionnel,” “Esquisse d’un Programme d’Enseignement Professional Pour la Syrie et Le Liban.” The report was circulated between the High Commissioner and the Counselor for Public Instruction (CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 27, correspondence).
students were sons of landowners,” and teachers could complete training sessions at the school.\textsuperscript{563} Since the goal in Syria was, in his opinion, “not to create a supplementary administration nor spend a lot of money,” he rejected projects premised on widespread use of new technologies and the expense that would entail, insisting instead on an approach justified as bringing rational, scientific knowledge to existing agricultural practice.\textsuperscript{564}

While acknowledging that the impacts of such a program had only been felt in France during the past fifteen years he maintained these plans constituted a \textit{new} form of administration in the former Ottoman domains.\textsuperscript{565} According to Beriel, local peasants were “about as ignorant as the times of the Bible,” thus the goal was not “to buy a tractor for each Bedouin,” but to get local farmers to “better know [their] land” and “to improve [their] traditional methods of cultivation.”\textsuperscript{566} They would increase their revenues not by switching to new crops, but by planting their current crops in a “more rational manner.”\textsuperscript{567} The report highlighted what Beriel insisted was the “almost complete ignorance of scientific notions” among the local population, which his technical education program aimed to rectify.\textsuperscript{568} In fact, he even went so far as to state that the “spirit” with which the training was done—i.e. “in an experimental and scientific sense”—was even more important that the content itself.\textsuperscript{569} However, there was an underlying tension to this enthusiasm. In this “marching resolutely towards progress” he concluded, one must know how “to manage the traditions and not wreak havoc on the established social order under the pretext of making western science penetrate.”\textsuperscript{570} In his assessment, the benefits of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[563] See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 111, “Réunion des conseillers,” 3\textsuperscript{rd} session, 3 May 1934 for more details on Beriel’s prior experience in Tunisia and his expectations based on that.
\item[564] CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Formation Professionnelle,” 5.
\item[565] CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Formation Professionnelle,” 5.
\item[566] CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Formation Professionnelle,” 2, 3.
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purveying “scientific notions” should be weighed against the potential disruption to the social order that they could create. To further underline the distinctions between these processes in France versus the mandate, he characterized “science” as occidental and therefore inherently at odds with local order, defined by “traditions.”

Articulating the issue of agricultural education and expertise in these terms failed to acknowledge the well-developed and self-consciously “scientific” conceptualization underlying the network of technical educational institutions that had been expanding during the last decades of Ottoman rule in the region. While Beriel did acknowledge the existence of these institutions, his references to them served merely to demonstrate their incapacity to live up to their purported counterparts in metropole France. The Selemiye school, he declared, “pretends” to be a scientific establishment teaching agronomy, but its “facility is far from perfect,” not to mention that he doubted Lebanese students would “willingly” (de bon coeur) attend it. Meanwhile “the stations of Muslimiya (Aleppo) and Akkar (Lebanon) would be, if they had succeeded” experimental stations. The Muslimiya “station” was the Ottoman model farm of the province that, as discussed above, had had extensive operations in “scientific” agriculture since the 1890s.

His proposal refused to recognize the capacity of local experts to successfully apply “scientific” methods. He acknowledged that “young people” from Syria had gone to France to study agriculture, but upon their return had failed “to apply [this knowledge] to their lands.” He concluded that the problem was the lack of “educated supervisors, capable of understanding

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574 BOA, ŞD 2232.6.
them”—“them” being their lands presumably.\(^{575}\) There was no consideration given to the possibility that techniques learned in particular ecologies in France may not have been directly applicable to different terrains in Syria, much less a recognition that these local *agronomes* might know their land better than a foreign “supervisor.” Rather, there is the assumption that French experts would bring a “scientific” and “rational” approach that was distinctly different from local approaches, enabling them to claim expertise even over an unfamiliar environment. In this scenario, Beriel divorced definitions of expertise from local practice and experimentation, instead determining them solely by an “experimental and scientific” approach that was occident-derived. The conclusion he thus reached was that at first France must supply “expensive,” “superior personnel” who would then cultivate “disciples.”\(^{576}\)

Interestingly, the question of language was crucial for Beriel in defining this expertise. He stated that Arabic was incapable of expressing the concepts necessary to convey this scientific approach, characterizing it as “an instrument of very imperfect knowledge because it does not possess modern vocabulary, that it lacks precision and that its logic is not very rigorous.”\(^{577}\) Thus to be properly trained in “the rudiments of science,” students would have to become proficient in French.\(^{578}\) In line with this logic, the books to be used for instruction were to be imported from France or North Africa, adapted to the country, and as required translated into Arabic for adults.\(^{579}\) The only book on Syrian agriculture mentioned by Beriel was one by a French author M. Parmentier, which he heralded as a “novelty” but deemed too advanced to be of use in the classroom.\(^{580}\) Such plans demonstrated an apparent ignorance of existing texts

specifically about scientific approaches to the local environment produced during the Ottoman or Faysali periods by local authors thoroughly convinced as well about the necessity of these approaches to agricultural practice and active in international networks involved in producing and adopting this knowledge to local ecologies. On the other hand, this conceptualization of scientific expertise and the means by which it had to be reproduced and transmitted reflected Beriel’s own history—his training and experiences in Tunisia and circles of colonial knowledge production. Despite his appeal to the universality of this occident-derived science, the very particular ways in which he conceptualized its constitution and transmission demonstrate, according to Bourdieu, Beriel’s formation within “the historically constituted forms associated with the historical conditions of production, and [were] thus arbitrary.”

Beriel’s project is not one that recognized locally-produced knowledge as comparably scientific and rational to that possessed by French experts, much less one that had mediated between global networks of expertise and local practices and ecologies. Rather he premised his project on delineating a fundamental difference between local experts and French ones to bolster his argument that expertise must be brought from France, whether in the form of people or books. This course of reasoning sought to establish a transfer of knowledge that he conceived of as essentially unidirectional and hierarchical. The result was a proposal that emphasized the linkage of the region to the metropole through an institutionalized hierarchy of knowledge.

Beriel acknowledged that the priorities of the mandate were to send young people to France to attend “nos grandes écoles” and to focus on the experimental efforts “undertaken under the

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581 See for example Hüseyin Kazım, Çiftçi Çocuğ [Farmer Child] (İstanbul: Matba’a-i Hayiriya Şirkası, 1329/1331) from the late Ottoman period and Mustafa al- Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya al-Haditha [Modern Practical Agriculture] (Dimashq: Matba’a al-Hukuma, 1922 [1340]) based on experiments during the Faysali period and discussed in more detail below. Although Kazım’s book was published in Turkish and there is no evidence it was ever translated into Arabic, it appears it would not have been difficult to do so and it was presumably more tailored to the local environment.

direction of the agricultural counselor to which are disposed the administration of the
mandate.” 583 He insisted, however, that without “renouncing” the former or “sacrificing” the
latter, there was a “pressing interest, in [his] opinion, to rapidly choose a certain number of
young Syrians possessing land and committed to improving exploitation and to give them a
good, practical training, which will make them capable of increasing their revenues in practicing
the same cultures as before but in a more rational manner.” 584 That is, while he acknowledged it
was not a priority of the mandate state, if there was to be agricultural education in Syria in the
near future, it should be basic and practical. While ideally agronome-training scientific
establishments, experimental stations, and farm schools would all eventually be established,
given a paucity of budgetary resources, the mandate’s priority was the latter, which he described
as “educating children of modest means to better cultivate their land than their parents or their
neighbors.” 585 Meanwhile, according to Beriel, the mandate would remedy the lack of properly-
trained teachers by sending young people to France for two to three years to learn in technical
schools there. 586

His step-by-step plan for technical education in Greater Lebanon underscored this
emphasis on cost-cutting and institutional dependency. 587 An agricultural school for Lebanon
would be “prepared for the future,” but meanwhile he suggested that children should be sent to
the facility the Benedictines were proposing to establish in Ba’albak, which he admitted would
have “the huge inconvenience of being eccentric,” but would only require a subsidy and not the

586 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Esquisse d’un Programme,” 27. This process would be highly mediated by political
and economic concerns. He also suggests that eventually they could be trained through a stage in farm schools that
have become écoles normales professionnelles or currently in the School of Arts et Métiers for more industrially-
inclined pursuits.
587 I have not come across any similar plan for Syria.
full cost of a “complete facility.” Meanwhile, inspectors or engineers from the agriculture department or, failing that, young, French-educated Lebanese could give agricultural lectures to older students. Lessons should focus on things that could be “distributed in French” since it was “the only means of establishing a link with subsequent technical education which must also be given in French.” He envisioned rural schools as preparing students for an agricultural school to be “created as early as possible,” but “a higher order of education would be instituted later, if the necessity were felt, by the sending to France, whether in the schools of Arts and Métiers or the schools of agriculture, the subjects of the elite, thus trained and the cycle would be complete.”

The High Commissioner echoed this position--classes should be added to primary village and town schools to prepare students for professional education, then professional schools of agriculture would be created according to region, and finally an agronomy school would provide superior technical education. Economically the logic went “in every country, the development of technical education followed and favored, and did not precede and create, economic development.” Thus commercial courses offered in Damascus and Aleppo were good because they were “modest” and didn’t lead students to want to avoid the field of commerce; agricultural training was seen as geared to the same goal. It was a very different concept of agricultural education than that which would be urged by local technocrats. While each position maintained a

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588 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, “Programme d’Enseignement professionnel au Liban,” n.d. but attached to correspondence marked 11 February 1924.  
589 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, “Programme d’Enseignement professionnel au Liban,” n.d. but attached to correspondence marked 11 February 1924.  
590 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, “Programme d’Enseignement professionnel au Liban,” n.d. but attached to correspondence marked 11 February 1924.  
591 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, “Programme d’Enseignement professionnel au Liban,” n.d. but attached to correspondence marked 11 February 1924.  
592 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, High Commissioner to the Governor Public Instruction of Greater Lebanon, 11 February 1924.  
particular politics of difference, the mandate position posited a fundamental difference between the economic interests of the Syrian nation and the French one.

One could hardly imagine such a proposal for agricultural education development being acceptable for metropole France—i.e. the prioritization of agricultural education only for those who would go back immediately to work their own land. While this was certainly one aim, simultaneous cultivation of a bureaucracy of those trained in “scientific” agriculture to teach, inspect, and fulfill other administrative positions was central to technical education in the metropole. As will be demonstrated below, this was clearly the vision that local technocrats had for Syrian agricultural infrastructure. Given that the end goal of the mandate was ostensibly an independent nation-state, their concern for developing a comprehensive educational system within Syria was in accord with the dictates, such as those circulating in global networks like the IIA, which privileged “scientific” agricultural expertise as essential to prosperity, especially national prosperity.

Infrastructure building along these lines was what Ottoman bureaucrats had planned for the region when, prior to the war, they had established the practical school in Aleppo, the farm school in Selemiye, and a model and experimental field in Damascus. They had also planned to build in Beirut an agricultural high school along the lines of the Halkalı Agricultural School in Istanbul, which, for the purpose of a teaching qualification, mandate authorities recognized as having the equivalency of a diplôme d’ingénieur agronome. It had certainly been the source of a number of local teachers and bureaucrats staffing agricultural positions in the region during the Ottoman period. However, instead of the institutional diversity that characterized the

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development of local agricultural education during the Ottoman period, Beriel proposed what he
perceived as an expedient, stopgap measure dictated by a conception of expertise as occident-
derived and local practice as lacking “rational” approaches.\textsuperscript{596}

Beriel’s plan implicitly and explicitly sought to produce a hierarchical relationship
between Syria and the metropole, reinforcing bonds of institutional dependency and resource
extraction to the metropole’s benefit. This did not necessarily have to take the form of giving
every Bedouin a tractor, which he acknowledged would be to the profit of machinery dealers, but
which, given his low opinion of locals’ capacity to use these machines, he found impractical.\textsuperscript{597}
Nonetheless, his goal was still clearly to ensure that Syrian production served French economic
interests. As he concluded, instituting the plan he proposed was urgent “if we want to lead them
to sufficient production to assure themselves their needs and to permit us, after enriching them,
to involve our business and industry in their profits.”\textsuperscript{598}

Despite Beriel’s low opinion of local \textit{agronomes}’ capacity to improve their lands, as I
have demonstrated the privileging of an agricultural expertise defined by “science” and
“rationality” was well-established among a group of local technocratic elites since the latter
decades of the Ottoman Empire. Beriel’s insistence on exclusively French-derived notions of
technical and agricultural expertise, however, failed to acknowledge this local agency and legacy
of technocratic initiatives that had been grappling with the dictates of “scientific” agriculture in
the region since the latter part of the nineteenth century. In fact, in 1922, the year before Beriel
submitted his report for consideration, some of these efforts had culminated in Mustafa al-

\textsuperscript{596} In a seemingly unironic reference to the impacts of such a policy in North Africa, while marveling at the
existence of French institutions of higher education in the Levant, which Beriel attributes to the “persevering and
dedicated actions of our missions, supported by our government,” he notes that the large cities of North Africa,
except for Algiers, “remain deprived of institutions of higher education” (CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Esquisse d’un
Programme,” 5).
\textsuperscript{597} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Formation Professionnelle,” 3.
\textsuperscript{598} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 92, “Esquisse d’un Programme,” 28.

In addition to the observations made in the process of carrying out experiments in the Ghouta, which the book documented, al-Shihabi noted throughout the text various conclusions derived from ongoing experimentation at the Selemiye agricultural school. For instance, he explained in detail how experiments with a Fordsom tractor at Selemiye had proven less expensive than using animals, although he recognized the reluctance of farmers to invest in these machines due to lack of facilities for their repair.

Despite the recent devastating effect of World War I on much of the region, local attempts to experiment with and apply “scientific” agricultural were alive and well in 1922, although al-Shihabi’s introduction contains a hint of what was to come: he noted that the Ghouta agricultural school only held classes for one year before it was moved to Selemiye and consolidated with the agricultural school there.

In laying out his case for applying “modern” agriculture to the region, al-Shihabi presented a very different conception of the circulations of knowledge that had culminated in scientific agricultural expertise. In contrast to Beriel, he was careful to emphasize Arab contributions to the development of scientific agricultural expertise in Europe. He cited Ibn Wahshiyya’s ninth-century translation of the Book of Nabatean Agriculture as indicative of Arabs’ “exerting a major impact [li-hum il-qidh al-mu‘alli fi] in attention to agriculture,” noting

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599 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira‘a al-‘Amaliya, title page. By 1937, al-Shihabi would be recognized as among a group of local experts capable of explaining the “adaptation of Arabic to scientific needs and modern techniques” at the 1937 International Exposition in Paris (CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 135, Counselor for Public Instruction in the Syrian Republic to Counselor for Public Instruction the High Commission, 18? December 1936?). He would eventually also write several dictionaries of technical terms detailing their translation from French to Arabic to English. See for example Mustafa al-Shihabi, Chihabi’s dictionary of agricultural and allied terminology: English-Arabic, with an Arabic English glossary (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1978) and Dictionnaire français-arabe des termes agricoles (Le Caire: Imprimerie Misor, 1957).

600 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira‘a al-‘Amaliya, 128-131.

601 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira‘a al-‘Amaliya, 11.
that contemporary French experts had praised the work. In particular, he quoted the French agronomist Max Ringelmann as asserting the book was the first to record agricultural experiments in “a character of science [sibgha fann]” and that it was “a treasure of beautiful agricultural sciences.” He also quoted Ringelmann’s comments on Al-‘Awwam, an agriculturalist based near Seville in 12th-century al-Andalus who wrote a book based on his own experiments as well as drawing on other sources such as Ibn Wahshiyya. According to Ringelmann, it was “a collection of the best agricultural research written about by the Nabateans, Greeks, and Romans with that which was followed in al-Andalus.”

Al-Shihabi added that only four hundred years after al-‘Awwam would “Europe,” which he claimed “stayed ignorant of agricultural matters,” start to study agriculture—a process he pinpointed as beginning with Olivier de Serres’s book “The Theatre of Agriculture and the Administration of Fields.” Nonetheless, with the development of scientific agricultural expertise in the nineteenth century, the knowledge contained in al-‘Awwam’s lengthy work (over 1000 pages) would be considered crucial and it was translated into both Spanish (1802) and French (1864).

Al-Shihabi noted copies could be found in Paris, Leiden, the Escorial in Spain, and the British Library. Beriel’s account of an occident-derived “science” completely ignored such circulations of knowledge.

Having established Arab authors’ bona fides in the production of agricultural knowledge historically, al-Shihabi then proceeded to pen a comprehensive overview of “modern” agriculture

603 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya, 5. Al-Shihabi himself was apparently able to peruse the book at the Beyazit Library in Istanbul.
605 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya, 8.
606 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya, 8.
608 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-‘Amaliya, 8.
in the region. He did so in the hope that “the masters of agriculture (irbab al- zira’a) in Syria find the desired benefits from its observations and that the students in the practical agricultural schools [i.e. like Selemiye] are assisted by it because in it is all what they need from this science as for the students of agricultural high schools [i.e. like Halkah] they see in it a summary of what they study about general and specialized agriculture.” It’s chapters covered not only the gamut of “scientific” agricultural concerns and issues that might preoccupy Syrian farmers, but it also sought to define and categorize Syria’s local soil types and regional agricultural divisions as well as provide a comprehensive overview of Syrian agriculture from the grande culture crops of wheat and barley to industrial crops such as cotton and everything in between.

Indicative of his conception of agricultural priorities in the region, al-Shihabi concluded the book with a special section devoted to “dry-farming [zira’a al-’ard al-yabisa]” techniques, noting most of Syria’s arable lands were dry-farming lands, i.e. lands receiving between 250-500 millimeters of rainfall per year. In contrast, he insisted the technique was not necessary in Europe due to “frequent and well-distributed” rains, an observation suggesting that as an area of agricultural expertise French mandate administrators and their metropole-based schools would not have much first-hand experience. Al-Shihabi notes that his main source for explaining the applicability of this technique to Syria was a book published in 1912 by John A. Widtsoe, the president of the Agricultural College of Utah, entitled Dry-Framing: A System of Agriculture for Countries under a Low Rainfall. However, he was also careful to point out that “our fellah are not ignorant of some of the rules of this science and the Arabs previously followed it as is

609 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-’Amaliya, 11.
610 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-’Amaliya. See pages 42-76 for soil types and regional divisions.
611 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-’Amaliya, 589.
612 Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-’Amaliya, 590.
evidenced from the recitation (tilawa) of the Book of Agriculture (kitab al-falaha) that Yahya bin Muhammad bin al-‘Awwam al-Ishbili composed.\footnote{Al-Shihabi, al-Zira’a al-’Amaliya, 590. Tilawa can also mean “public reading” (Wehr, Arabic-English Dictionary, 117).}

Al-‘Awwam’s book not only demonstrated the science of agriculture that the Arab fellah had followed for centuries, al-Shihabi also stressed its significance as reflected by nineteenth-century translations into both Spanish and French. While the applicability of the Spanish translation is immediately apparent, the translator made clear the impetus for the French translation in 1864 in his introduction: while he was translating for both French and foreign scholars, the recent conquest of Algeria and efforts to undertake “useful work” in the region has made this kind of agricultural knowledge particularly valuable.\footnote{Clément-Mullet, trans., Le Livre de l’Agriculture, 98.} According to the translator, M. Clément-Mullet,

“In order to use in all of its extent its soil so fertile in cereals and which makes [one] to conceive of such lovely hope for the culture of cotton, it cannot be but very advantageous to aim to popularize the precepts taught by the Arabs. Written for the south of Spain and for Syria, in their greater part, they can thus be advantageously applied to Algeria, which has so many connections, for the climatologie, with these two regions...”\footnote{al-‘Awam, Clément-Mullet, trans., Le Livre de l’Agriculture, 98-99.}

“Scientific” agricultural knowledge produced in Syria and al-Andalus was thus to be integrated into the development of French agricultural expertise.\footnote{I am still trying to determine to what extent dry-farming experiments carried out in North Africa might have been part of mandate officials’ backgrounds.} From Utah to Syria and from Syria to al-Andalus to Algeria, such circulations of agricultural knowledge clearly complicated any notion of a simple unidirectional process of knowledge transmission and belied the binary suggested by Beriel whereby agricultural practice in France was rational whereas that in Syria was not. Rather it was a distinction produced in the process of justifying French intervention in Syria’s agricultural sphere.
Cultivating Expertise: the Selemiye Agricultural School and *al-Zira‘a al-Haditha*

Dry-farming experimentation was indeed a priority at the Selemiye agricultural school, which was ideally situated ecologically and which, for the first decade of the mandate, under the auspices of the High Commission’s Service of Agriculture, did indeed function as a comprehensive agricultural school for the region. The agricultural journal, *al-Zira‘a al-Haditha [Modern Agriculture]*, published by Omar Termanini and his brother Said out of Hama, frequently featured the school’s activities among its pages. The school consisted of a 1,000 dönüm farm composed of cultivable lands, an orchard, a vineyard, a vegetable garden, artificial meadows, a nursery, and fields for experimentation with an additional 2,000 dönüms of cultivable land and permanent meadows. Primarily French-educated teachers trained the school’s students to direct and cultivate a rural farm as well as to serve in the mandate’s agricultural services. At the school it appears they worked alongside salaried employees who did much of the field labor. They were also involved in support for local farmers carrying out projects like canal cleaning or undertaking other local initiatives to increase cultivation or

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618 Achard, “La Syrie,” 166.
619 “Al-Suhuf wa al-Majallat,” *Al-Mar’a* 2:2 (February 1932): 24. As a “former rebel,” Said had apparently been condemned to death by the mandate administration but was pardoned. He was considered a “notorious extremist” and was know for encouraging assaults on voting bureaus in 1931. According to French intelligence reports he would later become the commander of the Hama Iron Shirts. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 473, “Renseignements sur les Signataires de la Petition de Hama du 7 décembre 1933,” and CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1934, Bulletin d’Information Hebdomadaire, Homs, 26 January 1937.
622 See CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 864, “École d’Agriculture de Selemieh,” “Information” signed by Berthelot, 18 November 1937 and “Tasmid al-Hinta nau‘ al-asmida wa miqdaritha,” *al-Zira‘a al-Haditha* 3:6/7 (September/October 1927): 435 which featured a photo of a fellah working in the school’s fields. While Berthelot claimed the students received an “almost purely theoretical education” as they considered themselves to be in training to be *ingénieurs agricoles*, another mandate report noted in 1930 that some sons of cultivators had been admitted in 1930 who did not follow any courses and worked only in the fields (CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1850, “Rapport Trimestriel Homs-Hama,” 27 December 1930).
experiment with new methods. One canal they repaired for 4,800 francs provided 66 liters of water an hour. By the early 1930s, 360 canals had been restored and were in use. Despite a declared mutual interest in acquiring, applying, and disseminating scientific agricultural knowledge, the relationship between the school and the mandate state became increasingly acrimonious as the students found their ambitions for the knowledge they acquired stymied by government policies. The director of the school appears to have envisioned it as an agricultural high school that would confer a degree equivalent to the French bac, but within the hierarchies of expertise established under the mandate the students found their efforts to gain this level of certification foiled. Mandate authorities clearly considered the school’s main goal to be the production of farmers (agriculteurs) trained in scientific agricultural expertise—the fact that only 12% of the students went on to farm indicated that the school was not “attaining the goal for which it was founded.”

Local technocrats and the school’s students, in contrast, viewed the school as primarily a training ground for posts in the state’s agricultural administration, whether serving as a teacher, an agricultural employee, or a mudir in the administration of a district (nahiye). In the summer of 1928 the school’s graduates implored the High Commission to set the value of their diplomas from a “scientific perspective” and find them jobs in the state domains or give them preference in posts associated with the ministry of agriculture such as those related to agricultural banks, the service of the cadastre, or the state’s veterinary service. Despite the fact that the deputy delegate of the High Commission wrote the High Commissioner that the Selemiye degree was

623 Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 118; Izzat Traboulsi, L’Agriculture Syrienne entre les deux guerres (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Nassar, 1948), 93.
624 Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 118.
626 “Khirriju al-zira’a wa al-hukuma,” al-Zira’a al-Haditha, 4:5 (March 1929): 228
supposed to be equivalent to that granted by a practical agricultural school in France, that the Syrian government was particularly keen to find positions for these students in the administration, and that six Selemiye students currently served in the domains of the state and gave “full satisfaction,” their request seems to have gone unheeded. Another initiative proposed in the summer of 1928 by the school’s recent graduates, whereby the government would rent them some state land in various districts (nahiye) of Syria with the promise of selling it to them eventually, also met with rejection, or as al-Zira’a al-Haditha more colorfully put it “like a scream in a valley,” despite the fact that mandate officials had proclaimed this was their preferred method for pursuing mise en valeur and small property ownership. The editor also rejected claims that the students were uninterested in farming, insisting that regardless of the difficulties, “a number of the graduates welcome agricultural works no matter how tedious or tiring.”

By 1929, tensions were on the rise. On 9 November 1929 the students went on strike, demanding the firing of one of their supervisors who had tried to suppress the chanting of “obscene and biased” songs. A report identified the instigators of the strike as the sons of Nouras Kilani, a Hama notable, Aref Kilani, and Abdul Rahman Shishakli. The school was shut down temporarily on the 13th of November and the report recommended that the strike instigators not be allowed to return given the school’s reputation as “a center of advanced

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629 “Khirriju al-zira’a,” 228; Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 146; Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation, 244.
630 “Khirriju al-zira’a,” 228.
632 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 953, “Grève à l’École d’Agriculture de Selemieh,” 18 November 1929. Nouras Kilani (Nawras al-Kaylani) occupied an interesting position in Hama. He was the leader of the local union movement and had an influential “grip on nationalist political life in Hama,” but he was not aligned with the National Bloc, which apparently wanted to reduce his influence (Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, 368-370).
nationalism.”  Six students were suspended for a year. In September 1930, Omar Termanini and other professors of the school were accused of trying to lead a nationalist campaign among the Ismailis of the area and the students were charged with “caring especially for politics and very little for their agricultural studies...manifested many times by their disorders and strikes.”

Mandate authorities proposed to “reform” the school by converting it into a farm school—a demotion in the educational hierarchies of scientific agricultural expertise and one fiercely protested by the students. As globally more students gained access to technical agricultural education, the status of their degree was fundamental to their ability to continue to compete and climb the ranks of the scientific agricultural expertise hierarchy and further distinguish their knowledge as more advanced. Interestingly, one of the main obstacles to granting the desired degree was that the students’ knowledge of French was too rudimentary—in July 1931, an official from the ministry of public instruction, wrote that French had not even been offered at the school for the past year. Apparently the school’s directors did not consider French an essential component of agricultural education, despite Beriel’s opinion to the contrary. When the ministry of public education official requested leniency in granting the students the equivalency they sought, Beriel maintained his position that “there is no assimilation possible between the bac and a diploma of Selemiye.” Without a bac equivalency the students were

634 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 953, Information No. 2933, 3 December 1929.
635 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 954, “Ecole d’Agriculture de Selmieh,” Information No. 32, 18 September 1930. One report noted that during the summer of 1930 Selmiye was much calmer since the primarily nationalist employees of the school were on vacation (CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1850, Rapport Trimestriel Homs-Hama, 27 September 1930).
639 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Equivalences de baccalareat” M. Collet to the Inspector General, 11 July 1931,
unable to continue their studies as they did not have the certification necessary to move to the next level.\footnote{CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 76, “Enseignement technique et agricole.” The drama around the schools seems to have rather inflamed passions in more than one department. On 4 December 1929 the IP Counselor for Syria wrote to the IP Counselor “You have asked me for an account of the incidents of the agricultural school at Selemiye. I have the honor to let you know that this costly institution is the responsibility of the Minister of Agriculture to which I am not accredited” (CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 76, “Enseignement official”). The amount requested for the school by the state of Syria in the c.1929-1930 budget was 14,000 LSP (CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 954, “Budget de l’Instruction Publique,” “Liste des Travaux Demandes par les Divers Services de l’État de Syrie”), although the Minister of Public Works noted these amounts were subject to revision (CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 954, “Budget de l’Instruction Publique,” Minister of Public Works of the State of Syria to M. Hoppenot, 23 December 1929).}

The pages of the local journal \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} reflected the increasing antagonism between the students and the state. Beginning publication in January 1924, it chronicled the school’s operations, the expertise it generated, and the circumstances that led to its eventual demise. By the time of the 1929 strike, the journal’s editor, Omar Termanini, had become the director of the school.\footnote{CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 953, Information No. 2814, 12 November 1929.} Its pages included a variety of articles by local authors covering all aspects of scientific agricultural expertise, but it also included serialized translations of reports by various agricultural specialists associated with the mandate such as M. Parmentier who wrote about agriculture generally and M. Achard, the mandate’s agricultural counselor, who contributed, among other things, a series of articles on cotton.\footnote{For Parmentier’s articles see for example “al-Zira’a fi Suriya,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:1 (January 1924) and “al-Zira’a fi Suriya,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:2 (February 1924). For Achard’s articles see for example “al-Qtn fi Suriya,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:2 (February 1924) and “al-Zira’a al-Qtn fi Suriya 2,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 1:7&8 (July and August 1924).} Clearly, the journal did not face a significant barrier in translating French technical agricultural texts into Arabic. But the editor was not just interested in including French-based agricultural knowledge, rather the journal regularly featured excerpts detailing agricultural expertise derived from locales as diverse as Brazil, Queensland, California, South Africa, and Scotland.\footnote{See “al-Muqtatafat,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 3:6&7 (September/October 1927); 3:9&10 (December/January 1927); 3:3 (April 1927); 4:1 (November 1928).} The editor even journeyed to
Germany at one point and each year the students would take field trips to observe agricultural practices in different environments.\textsuperscript{644}

While the journal was intent on publishing and disseminating expertise from around the globe to its subscribers, it also claimed to be interested in making this knowledge accessible to local farmers. In the spirit of this goal it published a series of articles entitled “Hadith al-Fellah,” which chronicled the visits of an \textit{effendi} technocrat to various villages in order to talk with local \textit{fellahin} and explain to them the benefits of scientific agriculture. These accounts not only reveal the slippage in what the \textit{effendi} thinks the peasants’ problems are and what the peasants think they are, but they also provide insight into local peasant conceptions of expertise and how their \textit{effendi} interlocutor distinguishes his “scientific” agricultural expertise from their “non-scientific” knowledge.

They also suggest that the journal’s more elite readers were intrigued by these insights into village life, which confirm through their presentation of peasant knowledge the “scientific” expertise the journal’s readers valued.\textsuperscript{645} The author acknowledged that peasants have a treasured agricultural knowledge passed down from father to son through proverbs that were “almost…their agricultural rules and regulations, and their fathers and grandfathers have honed them so among them [these proverbs] have the sanctity of the glorious past and the holiness of the venerated law.”\textsuperscript{646} He also emphasized his efforts to spend time with the \textit{fellah}—going to their councils, attending their nightly gathering and listening to their economic woes—as well as the

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\textsuperscript{644} “1700 Madrasa Zira‘iya,” \textit{al-Zira‘a al-Haditha} 5:4 (February 1932), 212, “Rihla Zira‘iya fi Filistin,” \textit{al-Zira‘a al-Haditha} 3:6&7 (September/October 1927): 445. The journal also closely followed developments in neighboring countries such as Turkey, for example comparing the fact that three women in Turkey were able to pursue advanced agricultural studies at the same time that a decision had been taken to shut down the Selemiye school. See “al-Zira‘a wa al-Jins al-Latif fi Turkiya,” \textit{al-Zira‘a al-Haditha} 5:9&10 (August/September 1932): 624.

\textsuperscript{645} See author’s remarks prefacing the second article in which he thanks readers for their compliments (“Hadith al-Fellah,” \textit{al-Zira‘a al-Haditha} 3:4 (May 1927): 242).

tendency of his presence in a village to always cause a stir because he wore afrangi (European) clothes but also claimed familiarity with (waqif ‘ala) agriculture!647

During a visit to ‘Amara, a village of more than 100 houses west of Aleppo, the fellah, in disbelief that he was “from those who plowed the earth with their own hands,” gathered to quiz him on his agricultural knowledge.648 They asked him questions about wheat and barley and lamented the lack of rain, wondering whether Europeans (al-afrang) could bring down “water of the sky” when they chose.649 There ensued a rich exchange in which the author was intent to prove his knowledge to the peasants by discussing with them various agricultural subjects. He would note, for example, the need to sow seed with care, to which the peasants responded with proverbs that conveyed similar ideas. In particular, they mentioned “the fallow is a flute” (al-bur tunbur) and “the splitting is adornment and the second is a mirror” (al-shiqaq zawaq wa al-tanay maray), both of which conveyed the sense that failure to properly prepare the soil for sowing resulted in poor returns.650

The author requested more proverbs and described how a peasant elder sitting in a corner “listening to our conversation like a venerable shaykh to his young grandsons” responded with the “serious wisdom” and “precious advice” from his grandfather who had lived to be 120 years old and had insisted on “conquering the earth with work.” The shaykh explained that one should not be content with merely two plowings, rather “the third is stabilization and the fourth opens the pit and sale and the fifth goes in the bag, and the sixth builds upon it the row, so plow the earth many times and mark into it many rows for to each row there is a season and to each

peasant a harvest."  

In response, the effendi played his scientific agricultural trump card, explaining that European plows have the capacity to reach in one or two plowings the depth achieved by local plows after five or six (and they were, or so he insisted, cheap!) to which he claimed most of the peasants responded “If only the government gave us these types of implements and taught us how to use them.” One cannot easily judge the tone of the response—it appears the villagers did not reject the possible usefulness of this technology out of hand—but their emphasis, mediated by the author’s reporting of it, stressed the need for infrastructure to make its use feasible.

An exchange during another visit further elucidated the distinctions between the peasants’ and technocrat’s perspectives about the essence of productivity. The effendi author insisted productivity was tied to more work and not just swearing by the ways of their forefathers. In particular, he urged the peasants that “blessing is in movement” (al-baraka fi al-haraka) and that new approaches to feddans and plowed rows were the issue, which could be fixed by learning the “science” of agriculture in schools. The farmers, in response, rejected feddans and plowed rows as the key to improved agricultural production, insisting that what the earth brought forth was a factor of “blessings (baraka) from God.” Productivity for them was largely tied to elements beyond their control. When the author extolled the Selemiye agricultural school’s benefits, he was surprised when an elder responded:

Walla ya effendi, one of those that you mentioned [i.e. a student of the agricultural school] passed by and informed us of many benefits about how to cultivate vines and prepare the soil and he said that he obtained this good information in the agricultural school in Selemiye and ideally if we were rich and our children could read and write

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we’d send them to the agricultural school to learn agriculture *(falaha)* from the agricultural teacher.  

Again, while not completely dismissive of the ideas coming out of the agricultural school, the peasant elder emphasized the economic and social differences that mediated access to this privileged “scientific” expertise. In January 1928, the journal republished an excerpt from *al-Kulliyah*, the American University of Beirut’s college magazine, in which Halim Najjar, the teacher of animal science at the University, underscored that the main needs of farmers were not large combine harvesters or schools, but rather “improving markets for distribution” and ensuring that they received a good price for their products. “How,” he asked “can we ask him [i.e. the *fellah*]…to use modern agricultural tools and implements if the harvest does not increase his income?” Such discussions clearly demonstrated that the agricultural expertise privileged by local elites, the mandate authorities and international organizations would mean little to peasant farmers if the infrastructure to access markets or ensure decent crops prices didn’t exist. Rather their own, more cost-effective expertise would remain the most economically viable.

Despite these more pressing concerns, increasing access to institutionalized agricultural education and the cultivation of a distinctly “scientific” expertise continued to preoccupy local elites invested in plans for economic development, albeit with consideration for the practical difficulties involved. They saw the proliferation of such institutions in various European countries as indicative of how those countries built and maintained economic strength. *Al-Zira’a al-Haditha* devoted an entire article to discussing the number of agricultural schools and societies established in countries like France, Denmark, Belgium, and Germany proportional to their populations and suggested that this was indicative of their high quality of “economic

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life.”\textsuperscript{657} It noted that in order to keep up Syria should have 82 schools and 3,387 students to compare with Germany and 95 schools with 10,000 students in addition to 130 centers of seasonal agriculture lessons with 11,000 listeners to compete with Denmark. Given that Syria only had two schools and one of them, Bouka, was foreign, the journal insisted it was no surprise that “this country, delayed in agriculture, is behind in other branches of economic life.”\textsuperscript{658} Such a logic was behind the journal’s support not only for the Selemiye agricultural school, but also a system of village schools to increase literacy while conveying practical elementary agricultural knowledge taught by students from the Selemiye school.\textsuperscript{659}

The expansion of education, including rural education, was ostensibly a primary goal of the mandate administration. From 140 public schools in 1919, the High Commission counted 552 schools under its purview in 1926, although they tended to rely heavily on private enterprises for education institutions as well—their numbers reached 1218 by 1926.\textsuperscript{660} An initial report on the “Fundamental Reforms for Public Education in Syria” noted the need to “modify the programs of village school with regards to reading, writing, agriculture, and economic principles. The students will study the sciences which their milieu needs….”\textsuperscript{661} The students were to be formed as workers or farmers instilled with “a taste for manual professions.”\textsuperscript{662} But despite these impressive numbers there appears to have been aspects of neglect. The inhabitants of Deir el-Zor complained that while under the Ottomans there were 15,000 residents and four

\textsuperscript{657} “1700 Madrasa Zira’iya,” 212-3. The stats he provides are as follows: Germany has 1700 agricultural schools and 70,000 students, France has 70 schools and 2,500 students, Belgium has 8,000 center for seasonal agricultural lessons with more than 35,000 listeners, and Denmark has 95 schools and 10,000 students as well as 130 centers and 11,000 listeners.

\textsuperscript{658} “1700 Madrasa Zira’iya,” 213.


\textsuperscript{660} Haut Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation, 99. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 2, “Rapports,” “Rapport de Mahommed Effendi Kurd Ali” for details.


\textsuperscript{662} Haut Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation, 103.
primary schools, under the mandate they now had only one primary school creating a situation in which they had to raise 50 Syrian liras to create another class to accommodate one that had grown to over 80 students.⁶⁶³

*Al-Zira’a al-Haditha* pointed out some of the more practical issues that affected the functioning of these schools. Roads were poor and villages far apart so children could not easily go from one to another. In contrast it claimed that in Europe villages were closer together, roads were paved and large automobiles took children back and forth. It also suggested that in Syria teacher resources were not being properly inspected and distributed in ways best-suited to local needs.⁶⁶⁴ In one *kaza* it claimed there were three schools with only 4-20 students between them and in another the education minister finally took a tour in the villages and found one in which there were two teachers (each of whom received a monthly salary of 25 gold French lira) and only 20 students so one teacher was always absent and the other one was busy with “writing amulets.” The minister then ordered the absent teacher to teach in ‘Amara, a city of not less than 50,000 inhabitants while the other teacher stayed.⁶⁶⁵

The journal proposed opening one school for each *kaza* and large *nahiya* that would teach basic agricultural principles and industries, but not exceed in their level of food or dress the life conditions of the students’ rural families.⁶⁶⁶ While their desire to keep peasant children on the land accorded with the proposals of mandate officials, for local technocrats this aspect of agricultural education constituted one part of a more comprehensive infrastructure. According to nationalist technocrats, the cultivation of scientific agricultural expertise should involve multiple levels of Syrian society, but would be organized in such a way that it would maintain those

⁶⁶⁵ “al-Ta’lim fi al-Barriya,” 77.
⁶⁶⁶ “al-Ta’lim fi al-Barriya.” 77-78.
levels—and this organization clearly entailed a need for upper level agricultural institutions as well as elementary level ones.

In laying out plans for village schools and other aspects of rural administration, *al-Zira‘a* al-Haditha expressed frustration with the lack of administrative oversight and technical expertise among those chosen for these positions, a situation which it contrasted with administrative practice during the Ottoman period. It noted how under the Ottomans, there was an institution—the Mülkiye School (*Madrasa al-Mulkiye*)—that “graduated for the country what it needed from administrative authorities and they would gradually advance along the ladder of progress rung by rung starting from the *muduriyat* of the *nawahi*. Then God willed to separate Syria from this wide empire and we do not know—would we say that this separation was from its misfortune or good fortune?”

Having “boldly” posed this question, the journal went on to claim that “the governments of Syria have appointed people [to the *muduriyat*] that are not connected to the corps of administration or knowledge (‘ilm) at all (*bi-sila min al-silat*)” and that the basis of their qualifications for these posts remained unclear, noting that there was not a school that resembled the Mülkiye in terms of training people to fill these basic administrative positions. The editor alleged that if one asked one of these *mudirs* what he had accomplished even after years in the job, he would not have an answer. What is more he claimed there was no government oversight, noting that if one asked a *mudir* about the level of supervision, he would say that “he has not seen an inspector the entire time he has been in the job.” Not only did he suggest that central government control and oversight had decreased under the mandate but his critique also targeted

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667 “*Khirriju al-zira‘a*,” 227.
668 “*Khirriju al-zira‘a*,” 227. “Boldly” is how he characterizes the article—“*al-kalima al-jari‘a*” (226).
669 “*Khirriju al-zira‘a*,” 227. According to Ottoman documents, mülkiye inspectors were commonly called in to arbitrate disputes in rural areas.
the lack of qualifications held by those in these positions. Rural bureaucrats needed to be properly trained.

There seems to have been some tension over the appointment of inspectors between the Syrian government and the mandate’s French counselors. In 1929 Muhammad Kurd Ali, the Minister of Public Instruction for Syria, lodged a complaint with the High Commission’s Secretary General concerning the elimination of the posts of Inspector for Damascus and Hawran and replacing them with a post of Inspector General. In his explanation he stressed the suitability of those who held these posts both due to their relation to those they inspected and their administrative training and acumen. Mustafa Bey Tamer, the inspector for Damascus, had twenty years experience in teaching and administration and had taught most of the professors in the Faculty of Medicine and Law. Aouad Bey Amiri, the inspector for the Hawran, was not only from the Hawran, but had studied in Europe, and as a Hawrani representative of the Syrian government demonstrated the government’s concern for the interests of the Hawran, whose inhabitants Kurd Ali noted “did not cease to demand from the Syrian government the creation of new primary schools.” Furthermore, al-Zira’a al-Haditha insisted that the Selemiye graduates were not only eager to fill posts in rural areas as mudirs, officials, or teachers in nawahi, but due to their agricultural training they were better positioned to understand the “maladies and pains” of those who practiced agriculture. Since mudirs were posted in the middle of farmers and fellah, al-Zira’a al-Haditha argued, the graduates were ideally suited for these positions and

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671 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 954, “Budget de l’Instruction Publique,” Explications, 31 December 1929. An attached table of the budget proposed by the French Counselor versus that proposed by the Syrian Minister of Public Instruction indicates distinct priorities. The Minister aims to allot more to the salaries of the staff of the central administration, high schools, and primary schools as well as to scholarly materials, whereas the Counselor proposes more for subsidies and the repair work on the ruins of Palmyra. (The Minister does not allot any funds for the latter, which he indicates should come out of the public works budget.)
672 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 36, “Programme d’Enseignement professionnel au Liban,” n.d. but attached to correspondence marked 11 February 1924; “Khirriju al-zira’a,” 228-229.
could serve as an example to farmers and a link between the village and the government.\textsuperscript{673} The editor stressed the importance of using administrators sent to rural areas as a means of creating stronger linkages between the central state and its rural communities.

In addition to emphasizing the need for an internal network of educational institutions that would incorporate expertise from multiple perspectives and ecologies and translate it into local practice, the journal also stressed how the specialists trained in these schools and sent into rural areas would form a crucial link between the state and rural communities. While Syrian technocrats insisted on the importance of engaging in international networks of expertise and applying new techniques locally, mandate administrators seem to have been largely dismissive of such initiatives, unless it were that of one of their clients, and more often than not tended to frustrate these efforts. As stated above (and to be addressed in more detail below), mandate officials were particularly wary of the potential nationalist or international influence this could facilitate, especially given that the League of Nations sanctioned activities initiated by other “nations” under the mandate. French officials appear to have considered agriculture-related projects a key realm in which this infiltration might happen, impacting rural areas in particular. Initiatives that might privilege expertise from other “national” sources were a constant concern. These attempts by the school and journal to disseminate knowledge from a variety of international sources and encourage ties based on technocratic expertise between the state and rural communities appear to have sparked tensions as it became clear that mandate rule prioritized only certain agricultural initiatives, not a more comprehensive state-centered approach.

With the coming to power of a government led by moderate National Bloc candidates and their policy of “honorable cooperation,” the new agricultural minister, Jamil Mardam Bey,

\textsuperscript{673} “Khirriju al-zira’a,” 228-229.
promulgated the decision on 21 July 1932 to shut the school down.\textsuperscript{674} While it is unclear how much this move involved bowing to French pressure, it infuriated local technocrats. The reasons given for the school’s closing were that its students wanted to go into government service rather than actually work the land themselves and that it was necessary for economic reasons.\textsuperscript{675} \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} had already made its case for why the former was unreasonable, in reply to the latter, it exclaimed “when did economy necessitate closing a scientific establishment in a country thirsty for knowledge?”\textsuperscript{676} The journal published the ministry’s decision as a “service to history”\textsuperscript{677} and lambasted the lack of expertise of those in the Agriculture Ministry and the report submitted by the Agriculture Committee to the Economic Conference in Damascus. The report apparently suggested that the school be closed and in its place an experimental center established in order to “improve agriculture,” which \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} derided as a plan constituting “corruption” (\textit{fasad}).\textsuperscript{678} Nonetheless, the journal urged these non-experts to cooperate with the experts, who were “no doubt known to the responsible powers,” and urged them if they are going to close the school to at least do more for elementary agricultural education.\textsuperscript{679}

While the new government acknowledged a need for higher level agricultural education, in a move clearly at odds with the priorities of \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha}, it chose to focus its resources on elementary level agricultural education. In July 1933, it promulgated an education law that would include a plan for agricultural education, incorporating it into elementary and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{674} “\textit{Fi-Alam al-Zira’i},” \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} 5:9&10 (August and September 1932): 622-623.
\item \textsuperscript{675} Albert Khuri, “Agriculture,” In \textit{Economic Organization of Syria} (Beirut: The American Press, 1936), 100; Sarrage, \textit{La Nécessité d’une réforme}, 145.
\item \textsuperscript{676} “\textit{Fi-Alam al-Zira’i},” \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} 5:9&10 (August/September 1932): 622; Khoury notes that the National Bloc “never stretched so far as to include problems of internal social and economic development, which they perceived to be inimical to their own interests” (Khoury, \textit{Syria and the French Mandate}, 264).
\item \textsuperscript{677} “\textit{Fi-Alam al-Zira’i},” \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} 5:9&10 (August/September 1932): 622.
\item \textsuperscript{678} “\textit{Hawla Ilgha al-Madrasa al-Zira’iya},” \textit{al-Zira’ a al-Haditha} 5:9&10 (August/September 1932): 523-4.
\item \textsuperscript{679} “\textit{Hawla Ilgha al-Madrasa},” 523-4.
\end{itemize}
primary education and then complementary professional education classes. In this program, elementary education of four years was specifically designed “to furnish to a large part of the population an education exactly adapted to its needs and more in harmony with the degree of social evolution and the kind of life of our countryside.” While not “ideal” it was for the time being “fanciful” to want “to extend the duration of education in the village” and this “modest” program would be sufficient to provide students with some basic notions “without which the state does not have citizens.” The program also called for superior schools of agriculture, which would create technically-trained supervisors for large agricultural undertakings, but by 1938-1939 the only schools in operation under the rubric of technical education appeared to be four Schools of Arts and Métiers (two in Damascus—one for boys, one for girls, one in Aleppo, and one in Beirut) and two for Commerce. The only upper level agricultural training considered worthy of official mention was the International College of the American University in Beirut.

Meanwhile the intrigue involving Selemiye continued. The school was initially turned into an agricultural station as declared, but in 1935 it became a school to train teachers, although this did not, according to Bounoure, prove satisfying and after three years the classes were moved to Aleppo. The school’s lands and nurseries on the other hand were farmed out to individuals and this quickly became another source of building tension. The French assistant

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680 CADN/Syr-Syri-Liban/2, 100, “Enseignement officiel,” “Loi de 6 juillet 1933.”
681 CADN/Syr-Syri-Liban/2, 100, “Enseignement officiel,” Exposé des motifs, 1 October 1933. While the government represented this as an imperfect solution to social conditions, internal meetings between French counselors continued to stress the difference between Syria and the Occident, urging the examination of primary programs to ensure they were not “too academic or too directly inspired by the Occident” (CADN/Syr-Syri-Liban/2, 111, “Réunion des conseillers,” 3rd session, 3 May 1934).
684 CADN/Syr-Syri-Liban/2, 152, “Enseignement technique, professionnel, et agricole,” “Note” from Bounoure to the Secretary General, 28 March 1939.
delegate for the region, Berthelot, reported that members of a syndicate composed of various nationalists, including the brother of Toufik Shishakly, the Hama deputy, had rented the lands adjoining those of the school and had been promised (he does not indicate by whom) the “fruitful, well-watered, well-planted” lands of the school itself for a good price. Not only did this serve the interests of the syndicate’s members, but he claimed it “doubled as a political action” since the Ismailis had remained largely resistance to the National Bloc’s advances. In his opinion, the school, which he characterized as a “French-Ismaili creation,” belonged, in terms of its lands and irrigation, to the Ismaili community.

Their deputy, Emir Suleiman, had also protested against its closing to the Syrian government and the leasing of its lands, expressing his displeasure to his fellow deputy Shishakly, a protest for which Bertholot urged support. He repeated his request in 1939, noting the school’s usefulness for the “economic development of the region and our propaganda,” and forwarded a letter from Mirza Moustapha, another local Ismaili leader, who apparently in the hopes of appealing to mandate preferences in these matters suggested a French agent, M. Bonnion de Fleurac, as a possible director for the school. Despite stressing his familiarity with the region and attesting that he “gave all proof of agricultural capacity” Bounoure refused to support the project. He cited the “mal chronique” that had led to the school’s closure and the necessity to ensure any manager of an agricultural school possessed “great technical competence and a deep experience.” The Selemiye school seems to have been a kind of political palimpsest on which various factions projected their requirements of the moment—on the one
hand derided as too expensive, ineffective, and rambunctious, on the other urged as essential to region’s economic development and French influence or economic development and nationalist influence depending on who was in control of running the place. Such a convoluted history seems to encapsulate the ad-hoc, uncoordinated dysfunction that tended to characterize agricultural and technical education under the mandate.

Its students, however, remained active. Following the school’s closing, they wrote articles in publications such as *Les Echoes* and the nationalist *al-Qabas* critiquing mandate policies. In particular, they attacked the mandate’s agricultural counselor, Achard, for influencing the rejection of an agricultural reform and reorganization project proposed by the director of agriculture and economic services Joseph Atalla in the midst of a severe drought.688 *Al-Qabas* opined that the failure of the plan to pass the agricultural commission “affected the population in a way even more grievous than closing the Selemiye school,” which it considered emblematic of the mandate’s failure to cultivate the expertise necessary for Syria’s economic and agricultural potential. It queried whether the project’s “meager budget” was beyond the means of the treasury.689 The school’s closure continued to be a reference point for the detrimental impact of mandate rule on Syria’s economic welfare.

In 1933 five of the school’s former students finally obtained 250 hectares of state land 13 kilometers east of Saraqib through Aleppo’s Agricultural Inspector.690 After a year of work they had cleared and planted various kinds of European wheat on 80 hectares of it and were preparing

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688 See for example CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syria--La sécheresse et la situation agricole,” “Le Conseiller pour l’Agriculture,” 6 January 1933 and “La situation agricole” 29 December 1932 (this article is attributed to the “students with diplomas from the agricultural schools”—it does not make clear which schools are meant but presumably the students of Selemiye would be among those writing). See also *Les Echoes de Damas*, “Autour du rapport du Directeur de l’agriculture,” 5 January 1933.

689 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syria--La sécheresse et la situation agricole,” “La réforme agricole,” 1, 2, 3 January 1933; *Al-Qabas*, “al-madrasa al-zira’iya,” 27 April 1935.

690 This was most likely Tawfiq Ahdab who had been the director of the Selemiye agricultural school in the 1920s. See chapter 5 for more details.
to build a house with a garden around it. Beriel upon seeing it in his rounds described it as “an extremely interesting experiment” which if they “persevered” would achieve “a work of colonization analogous to those of North Africa and Palestine, of which there have not been until now any model in the territories under mandate.” He was especially enthused by the project because it would provide local farmers with practical demonstrations, which he claimed a school of agriculture only could never provide. He even suggested it should be repeated at various points elsewhere. Ironically, he claimed that the program of education that started with primary school reform and was to be followed by a farm school would thus be complete. He saw no need for a Syrian school of superior agriculture or to increase the numbers of those sent to France to study agronomy. He completely fails to acknowledge that those whose work and initiative he commended are the products of a school now closed whose purpose he apparently found superfluous.

Influence in the Countryside: The Politics of Educating the Fellah

In contrast to the drama surrounding the Selemiye school, the Bouka school established by General Billotte in the ‘Alawite state in 1922 became the poster child of mandate agricultural education. Focused on elementary education, its student body of 24 in 1927 grew to 42 in 1928. The school paid for the costs of its cultivation from the sale of its produce, recruited its students from among the sons of proprietors who wanted to develop their own lands, and had a cheap source of additional labor when the Latakia boy’s orphanage was transformed into an

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691 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934.
693 A photo of it was submitted to the League of Nation’s Exposition de la Paix in 1929 as exemplary of the agricultural institution-building accomplished under the mandate. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 67, “Exposition de la paix et de la Société de Nations,” Schoeffler(?) to the High Commissionner, 6 November 1929.
694 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 62, “Rapport”
“agricultural orphanage” and moved to the premises. In 1930, the Alaouite State’s mandate administrators arranged a contract to transfer the center to a Benedictine Congregation, which was already running a fromagerie in Ba’albek from which they made sales to Palestine. From the beginning, locals raised questions about the school’s privileged status. Members of the local representative counsel expressed some concerns about the sale of the Center without interest to the Congregation in a series of 25 annual installments. One suggested that in buying the domain from the state, the Congregation should pay some annual interest, whereas another stated that “from a purely commercial point of view” he did not consider the project “compatible with the interests of the State.” To justify this arrangement, M. Schoeffler, the governor of the State, insisted not only on the economy, but the expertise that the school would provide. Not only would it save the state 10,000 LS per year up front—the Center cost 20,000 LS to run annually—but it would bring to the region “experienced farmers” who would “introduce new methods of culture” and “use modern farming instruments.” An agreement was eventually reached and, in addition to the Center’s subsidy from the Alaouite state, it also received one from the Oeuvres Françaises, which, in the 1931-32 budget, amounted to 5000 francs. This clear support for certain forms of agricultural infrastructure over others fueled Termanini’s critique back in Selemiye.

695 Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation, 114-115.
696 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 89, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” “Procès-verbal,” 5 May 1930.
697 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 89, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” “Procès-verbal,” 5 May 1930.
698 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 89, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” “Procès-verbal,” 5 May 1930.
699 Haut-Commissariat, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation, 113; Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 146; CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 87, “Subventions scolaires,” Bounoure to Peyron, June 1931. There was considerable correspondence about how to ensure that, should the agreement between the Alaouite State and the school be terminated before the 25 years of the contract were up, the funds invested by the oeuvres françaises would not revert back to the Alaouite State. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 89. In 1935 the Center also received a subsidy from the High Commission to facilitate the installation of two looms. CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 977, “École de Bouka,” Lagarde to Schoeffler, 9 October 1935.
700 “Madrasa al-Zira’a wa Abniyatih,” al-Zira’a al-Haditha, 4:6 (April 1929): 285-286. He complained that the Selemiye school still only had the buildings from the days of the Ottoman Empire despite high hopes for agriculture’s advancement and that the government was stingy in providing funds for even basic amenities like labs
But despite its relatively ample funding, the Bouka Center had problems—for one thing the lands on which it was founded, after they began to be cultivated, proved to be not very fertile.⁷⁰¹ Selemiye’s school may not have been near the largest urban centers (neither was Bouka), but its ecology provided ideal terrain—a “second Ghouta”—in which to experiment with dry-farming methods—a priority for Syrian technocrats.⁷⁰² Bouka, in contrast, not only did not have lands well-suited to experimentation, but its project of expertise dissemination increasingly came under fire for being highly politicized. Student numbers dropped from 42 in 1928 to 29 in 1932 and 28 in 1933, rising only to 35 in 1934, although demand for entry exceeded this.⁷⁰³ Tensions between the center and local authorities also increased over time—at one point there was a debate in the Representative Council as to whether the amount demanded by the school from the state coffers for the orphans’ upkeep was inflated.⁷⁰⁴ The more overtly critical “Executive Committee of the Economic Agricultural Congress” from Tartous considered the Center among the various “unnecessary” and “useless” projects on which the State had spent liberally.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 134, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” Note from the Counselor for Public Instruction, 8 March 1937. This seems to have been a problem with several of the agricultural institutions established by mandate authorities. Beriel noted in 1934 that although the Meidan experimental station near Aleppo had “sufficient buildings and a complete staff” its soil was “insubstantial” and “mediocre in areas” (CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934).
⁷⁰² The agriculture minister in 1932 apparently used this term to refer to the area—an allusion to the oasis around Damascus. “al-‘Alam al-Zira‘i,” al-Zira‘a al-Haditha, 5:9&10 (August and September 1932): 622.
⁷⁰³ CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 94, “Mandate français”; CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 101, “Enseignement technique,” ‘L’Enseignement professionnel.” Most students came from Latakia although there were a few from Palestine and Lebanon. CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 110, “Mandat français.” In August 1934, 31 candidates had presented for admission but only 14 were accepted.
The coming to power of the nationalist government of 1936 made the political nature of the establishment more explicit.\(^{706}\) The Center’s director, Peyrton, concerned about the direction events were taking, wrote to ask about amending the Center’s covenant with the government. He suggested that the Center could start accepting students from Syria, Lebanon, and the Jabal al-Druze as this would provide a way of ensuring that agricultural agents “who will have a particular influence in rural milieus...receive a French training rather than a nationalist training, in the bad sense of the word” and thus ensuring the penetration of French influence within the “peasant population with which the mandate has had virtually no contact.”\(^{707}\) He also wanted to ensure the Center’s “normal development” by having it put perpetually under the High Commission where it would be “free from any control of local authorities.”\(^{708}\) Meanwhile, the new minister of education under the nationalist government, Abdul Rahman al-Kayali, visited the school and declared that any decision about its status would be left to the local government, adding that he could not foresee allocating funds for the establishment “because [the Ministry] possesses in its services the necessary schools to train in professions and agriculture.”\(^{709}\) Given that there were no other agricultural schools in Syria, his stance clearly seems calculated as a critique of the school’s political nature as well as perhaps its position’s ecological unsuitability.

\(^{706}\) See Khoury, *Syria*, 457-481.
\(^{708}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 134, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” Peyrton to the Delegate General,” 17 December 1935; Delegate of the High Commissioner to the Alaouite State to Martel, 15 October 1936; “Note for the Secretary General,” 4 May 1937.
\(^{709}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 134, “Centre agricole de Bouka,” Kayali to Mouhafiez of Latakia, 10 July 1937. In 1941, Peyrton would request over 700,000 francs of French administrators to start an secondary agricultural program at Bouka, but his request would be denied for budgetary reasons. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 167, “Enseignement technique et agricole,” Peyrton to Bounoure(?), 29 January 1941 and Bounoure to Peyrton, 17 February 1941. Bounoure noted that he did not “renounce” the idea, but that they would have to wait for “better days.”
It may also reflect the government’s desire to support local institutions over those seeking to advocate foreign influence as much as agricultural knowledge.\textsuperscript{710}

The Muslimiya model field turned Foch Orphanage represents an intriguing example of an attempt to transform an Ottoman institution into a force of French influence only to have it prosper once its control was reluctantly relinquished to local initiative. As the Ottoman model field for Aleppo, the project had been well-positioned on 40 hectares of excellent soil watered by the Quwayq river about 20 kilometers north of the city. Converted into an orphanage in 1921, the mandate started heavily subsidizing it in August 1925 to the tune of 105,000 francs.\textsuperscript{711} This continued until 1928 when the French budget allowed only 50,000 francs and the suggestion was made to ask the state of Syria for help. The mandate’s Damascus delegate deplored this possibility, explaining “I must expose to you how much it seems to me dangerous to alienate thus the independence of a purely French oeuvre, which counts among those which has contributed the most to maintaining our influence especially in Aleppo.”\textsuperscript{712} When additional French funds were not forthcoming the director of the orphanage, a M. Delhumeau, decided to resign. The Damascus delegate saw this development as a “considerable loss” since “[Delhumeau] made of the orphanage an oeuvre essentially French consecrated to young disinherited Muslims [sic],” despite the fact that when he resigned he left with one month’s unauthorized salary.\textsuperscript{713}

\textsuperscript{710} The lack of “agricultural schools of all degrees” was particularly lamented by al-Shihabi in a memorandum circulated in 1936 during his time as the Minister of Public Education. He also argued that peasants should be obligated to send their children to village schools. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 136, “Enseignement Officiel,” Circulaire from the Minister of Public Education, Mustafa Chehabi, 19 December 1936.

\textsuperscript{711} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934; CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, Assistant Delegate of Aleppo to the High Commissioner, 19 October 1929 and High Commissioner to the Damascus Delegate, 26 March 1928; Sarrage, \textit{La Nécessité}, 145.

\textsuperscript{712} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, Damascus Delegate to the High Commissioner, 25 October 1927.

\textsuperscript{713} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, Damascus Delegate to the High Commissioner, 1 March 1928 and Reclus to Delhumeau, 25 February 1928.
Unable to find a French director to replace him, much to the regret of the delegate of Damascus, the assistant delegate in Aleppo proposed none other than a M. Agop Oscan, identified as an ingénieur agronome, to take up the post. Oscan’s resume read like that of so many Ottoman provincial officials as he had moved from one post to another over the empire’s final decades even serving, as we saw in chapter 3, as the director of the Aleppo model field from 1904 to 1909. Despite official misgivings about his physical rigor for the job, Oscan appears to have proved himself an adroit manager. By December 1930, even with the reduced credits at his disposal, he had managed to balance the orphanage’s budget, settle his predecessor’s debts (9,732 francs) and achieve a 24,000 francs balance which he intended to use for further construction.

Several years later even Beriel commented on the Orphanage’s flourishing state since his last visit three years before. He noted that “the crops looked good, a vegetable and fruit garden had been created, the hen house and stable were clean, the orphans themselves, always in tatters,

714 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, Damascus Delegate to the High Commissioner, 23 April 1928.
715 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, “État de Service,” 6 January 1928. He had worked in Edirne, Chios, Trabulus Gharb (for a special project dealing with orange and olive tree diseases), Aleppo, Diyarbekir, and Adana (in the spring of 1921, a post he left for personal reasons). From September 1911 to November 1915, he was the agricultural director for the province of Aleppo, a post from which he notes he was wrongfully dismissed because he was Armenian. During the mandate he had worked as the agricultural agent for Jabal Sama’an and Ma’ara, the Under-inspector of Agriculture and Forests of the Agricultural Service of Aleppo, and had been named director of the struggle against locusts in 1923. He eventually had to retire from the locust struggle due to an illness that put him in hospitals for thirteen and a half months.
716 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2173, Damascus Delegate to the High Commissioner, 23 April 1928.
717 CADN/Syrie-Liban/3, Direction du personnel 128, “Oscan,” Oscan to Lavastre, 23 December 1930. Since 16 January 1928, he had spent 20,500 francs on building construction and repair, 18,000 on materials, 5,000 on buying and repairing bed linens, and 5,000 on clothing and shoes. It should be noted that a series of contradictory reports dating from 1928 and 1929, i.e. the first years in which Oscan would have served as director, suggest at first that the orphanage was well-run in the third trimester of 1928 and the first trimester of 1929, then suddenly following an inspection in the second trimester of 1929, it was declared “unkept” and the supervisor was asked to resign. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 2109, Rapport trimestriel 2nd trimester 1929—Aleppo and Rapport trimestriel 3rd trimester 1928—Aleppo and CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1848, Rapport trimestriel 1st trimestre 1929--Aleppo. The same was also suggested for Oscan, although he apparently was still running the orphanage in December 1930 and on the basis of his accomplishments since his arrival Lavastre, the assistant delegate for Aleppo, suggested that he be rewarded with a 500 francs bonus at the end of the year. See CADN/Syrie-Liban/3, Direction du personnel 128, “Oscan,” Lavastre to the High Commissioner, 27 December 1930.
appeared in a good physical state and resembled little peasants.”\textsuperscript{718} Despite its distance from the city, it had even cultivated a rather large clientele that would come from Aleppo to buy its poultry and garden products.\textsuperscript{719} Interestingly Beriel attributed this “satisfactory” state of affairs to the cutting of subsidies and the ensuing need for the orphanage to support itself more from its own resources.\textsuperscript{720} He made no mention of the change in management at the same time as the subsidy cut that had brought in a director with a depth of local knowledge and previous experience managing the same model field under the Ottomans. The contributions of local expertise did not figure into his assessment.

While mandate officials regarded the connections between urban and rural facilitated by these institutions a means of pursuing French influence in rural areas, they were concerned not only about how nationalists might use them, but also how other League of Nations’ members might try to exert their own agendas in rural areas through the guise of agricultural education. A mandate delegate in Latakia wrote to the High Commission to express his concern following the visit of a group of professors from the American University of Beirut (AUB). They had discussed with him their plans for an Institute of Rural Life under the auspices of the Near East Foundation in the region. He stressed the potential negative consequences of “allowing the interference of a foreign association in the conduct of the government.”\textsuperscript{721} His note was quickly followed by a letter from Bayard Dodge, the president of AUB, to the High Commissioner to explain that the purpose of the Institute was merely “to inspire landowners and tillers of the soil

\textsuperscript{718} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934.
\textsuperscript{719} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934.
\textsuperscript{720} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Note sur l’enseignement…,” 11 July 1934.
\textsuperscript{721} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 77, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” Delegate in Latakia to the High Commission, 10 July 1930.
to co-operate in the use of scientific knowledge for the improvement of rural life.” The language of science became a way to deflect any suggestion of a more political project.  

Dodge further insisted that the philanthropic project would not be large scale and that its importance should not be exaggerated, emphasizing the Institute’s desire to collaborate with the government. It was to be run by a committee of five professors from the University as well as a director, Crawford, and an assistant agriculture director, Halim Najjar. Crawford had been born and raised in Lebanon and was in the process of gaining a doctorate in agriculture from the University of California. Halim Najjar, whose article had appeared in al-Zira’a al-Haditha, had obtained his BA from AUB and had studied agriculture for two years at the University of California and six months in Montpellier. He insisted that the project responded to an assessment that “the areas where the work of reconstruction remains the most urgent were agriculture, the sale and dispersal of products of the soil,...and the development of public hygiene in the countryside.” The primary goal was to establish model farms and fields with “véritables techniciens.”

The competition this posed to French interests and governance was a palpable concern among mandate administrators who also took umbrage at the suggestion the region was still suffering from wartime conditions and was in need of “reconstruction” over a decade after the

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722 CADN/Syr-Liban/2, 77, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” Agreement between the Near East Foundation and the American University of Beirut, 1 April 1930.
723 See for example David Ludden, “Introduction,” in David Ludden, ed., Agricultural Production and Indian History (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), in which he notes the way development and educational institutions used the language of science to transcend political divides (10).
724 CADN/Syr-Liban/2, 77, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” Bayard Dodge to the High Commissioner, 22 July 1930.

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war’s end.\textsuperscript{727} While acknowledging that from a political and juridical point of view under the League of Nations they could not refuse the operations of a foreign organization as long as it did not engage in “political or religious propaganda,” they queried whether the proposed activities of the Institute could perhaps raise “from a political perspective, a rather grave objection.”\textsuperscript{728} As its goal seemed to be to “guide, counsel, and assist the populations or the already existing agricultural organizations…it could be indeed inopportune that to the inspection and control of agricultural matters by official bodies of the High Commission and the States, is added a similar activity of a private organization of nationality and foreign tendencies.”\textsuperscript{729} While a practical farm school was desirable, officials concluded, the Institute of Rural Life as currently envisioned was “inadmissible.”\textsuperscript{730} To counter its potential influence, the Inspector General of the Oeuvres Françaises suggested that the technical personnel of the Institute should include a French \textit{ingénieur agronome}, that the High Commission and States should be regularly consulted, and that copies of the reports sent to New York should be sent to the High Commission. Dodge had already agreed to the first two conditions.\textsuperscript{731} Finally, Beriel, the counselor of technical education, was to be consulted on how to orient the Institute.\textsuperscript{732} Despite Dodge’s use of the language of science to depoliticize the project’s potential impacts, mandate officials clearly considered such an institution to be a potential source of foreign influence in rural areas and therefore one to be carefully monitored and controlled.

The project resulted in the renting of 72 hectares on a farm in the Biqa’ at Talabaya, where, under the direction of Crawford and Najjar, cereals, vegetables, forage crops and fruit

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\textsuperscript{728} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” “Note,” 15 May 1931.

\textsuperscript{729} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” “Note,” 15 May 1931.

\textsuperscript{730} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” “Note for the Secretary General,” n.d.

\textsuperscript{731} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” Note by Bounoure to the Secretary General, May 1931.

\textsuperscript{732} CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Institut de la Vie Rurale,” Note by Bounoure to the Secretary General, May 1931.
trees were planted and ten cows, two bulls, and four oxen acquired. It focused on educating the children of small property owners with short-term courses (4-6 months) as a way to ensure the students would not seek administrative posts, but would be content with “the simple life of the village.” The farm school hosted nine students in 1932 and ten in 1933. The Institute involved follow-up once the students returned home and a young Frenchman, M. Gabert, presumably in response to the request noted above, was appointed head of cultivation. By 1934, the farm school had added summer courses for primary school teachers of public instruction in Lebanon, although they were actually attended by 14 from Transjordan and 20 from Lebanon of whom only eight were in public instruction. Noting that these numbers indicated the need for “substantial encouragement” to truly succeed, the Counselor for Public Education, Bounoure, nonetheless closed his report by commending the school’s “concrete and lively instruction, capable of producing very useful results in the rather underdeveloped rural milieu where the farm school recruits its students.” Apparently French concerns had been mollified by the acceptance and application of their conditions. Nonetheless, despite this relatively auspicious beginning, the farm school would close by 1937 due to lack of funds, although the Foundation would continue its work by having “propagandists” go to village and dispense practical agricultural advice in a village near Chtaura.

Its place would be taken by a farm established in the gardens of AUB where students in one of the two agricultural sections of the International College could participate in training courses. The program apparently attracted students of rural property owners interested in more practical than academic courses who would spend their summer traveling to rural villages to

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733 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 95, “Rapports,” “Université Américaine de Beyrouth pendant l’année 1932.”
734 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 95, “Rapports,” “Université Américaine de Beyrouth pendant l’année 1932.”
735 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, “Enseignement technique et professionnel,” “Note…Inspections dans la Bekaa,” 13 September 1934.
teach peasants “elementary notions of agricultural methods and hygiene.” Articles about their activities would appear in the local press, although the program evaluated its initial attempts at agricultural work in villages as “unsatisfactory” primarily because summer was not the best time to undertake agricultural work and the work was not “sufficiently under the supervision of experts.” Despite misgivings about foreign influence, French officials seem to have come to accept these AUB activities. While technically they could not be prohibited under mandate rules, perhaps this was also because the simple, practical nature of the agricultural instruction they emphasized suited mandate officials’ conceptions of what was appropriate agricultural educational programming for Syria and Lebanon—i.e., they actively sought to maintain their students as small farming proprietors.

Other local initiatives, however, that did not have the resources available to the AUB project, no matter how well their goals matched those of the mandate authorities nor how sympathetic they represented themselves to French efforts, struggled to find support. In 1934, the Greek Catholic Abbot Gariador wrote to LaGarde to request his support for an already in process project for a “modern” agricultural establishment on the domains of the Convent of Ain al-Juza near Saghbine in the Bïqa’. With the support of M. Risqallah Nour, an ingénieur agronome from the French school of Fribourg, the community had established a dairy and also had plans for a school of agriculture, which they suggested could either be built at the school or on an estate at Andjar. M. Antoine Issa Obeid, a student of the Institute Agronomique in France, had already studied the plan in a report submitted to both the French and Lebanese governments.

739 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, Abbé Gariador and Abbé de la Lajudie to Lagarde, 18 April 1934; CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 85, “Étudiants orientaux en France.” Obeid studied in France during the 1930-31 school year.
Despite there apparently being a desire to establish an agricultural school in the region and the community’s goals being well-suited to what mandate officials had indicated they preferred, Bounoure’s response was telling. After consulting a large proprietor in the Biqa’ whose interests in the matter were not made clear, Bounoure rejected the possibility of supporting the farm school, citing the well-watered but narrow area surrounded by steep hillsides in which the convent was situated as unsuitable to a school of agriculture. However, his primary concern seemed to be the principle suggested by the abbot of “Direction par des indigènes, contrôlée par des français”—which Gariador insisted would have “genuine advantages,” but Bounoure considered a “rather contestable” approach “inspiring a certain defiance.” He cited the experience of Peyrton at Bouka as indicative of the will and experience necessary to run a farm school, emphasizing that Peyrton had only carried it off because “he concentrates between his hands all the authority”—a project which had clearly had its own share of contestable results. Despite Gariador’s emphasis on partnering with two French-trained Lebanese agricultural experts, Bounoure appears to have considered the project’s local direction, even if inspected by the French, unsuitable to support.

740 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, Abbé Gariador and Abbé de la Lajudie to Lagarde, 18 April 1934.
741 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, Abbé Gariador and Abbé de la Lajudie to Lagarde, 18 April 1934; Bounoure to Lagarde, 13 September 1934. Bounoure also noted that in the well-watered lands of the convent the monks primarily tended mulberries, fruit trees, and vegetables, which was not appropriate for an agricultural school. The dairy, which treated the milk of ten cows and 300 goats, was, he contended, dilapidated despite Abbot Gariador’s insistence that over the past year the community had invested “significant capital” in transforming it into a “modern agricultural enterprise”—the crisis preventing them from expanding it as much as they would have liked. Despite this effort to demonstrate the community’s own investment in the project prior to asking for additional funds, Bounoure contended that if public Lebanese funds were used for the project—Gariador had requested 80,000 francs the first year and 30,000 for each following year—every other Greek and Maronite convent would also claim to be starting an agricultural school and the rule of dividing subsidies among religious communities would “squander the allotted credit and make it completely ineffective.” Despite all these excuses, it does appear that he may have considered the project worthwhile at an earlier point as it seems likely this is the project he refers to in the May 1934 meeting of counselors in which he notes to Beriel that there is a Greek Catholic project which may be a possibility for agricultural education (See CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 111, “Réunion des conseillers,” 3rd session, 3 May 1934).
742 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 109, Bounoure to Lagarde, 13 September 1934.
An interesting study in contrast that reflected the tendency of mandate priorities to favor very particular local clients was the attempted establishment of an agricultural school at Bsharri. According to accounts of the incident it appears the Lebanese government, at the urging of Bounoure who considered the project “so useful,” supported an agricultural school organized under the auspices of the Maronite Patriarch Arida in Bsharri and for which a local friar had already paid for the construction of a building. While the animal, plant, and land resources of the school were unclear—there was some suggestion that the Director of the School of Arts and Métiers in Beirut should be in charge—the local community’s response was not. In two separate petitions addressed to the High Commissioner and the Counselor for Public Instruction, they expressed their initial excitement about the school, but noted that since its creation they had noticed much to their consternation that it had actually become a school of “European dance.” Its director, they explained, was a relative of the Patriarch and, despite being a student of the Bouka school, was almost illiterate and had only received the post through clerical intervention. Moreover, the inspector of public instruction had been very disappointed to find only 10 students in the school during his last visit, who they clarified had only been brought there for the occasion. They demanded that if the government was going to spend 3,000 Syrian-Lebanese pounds on the project it “be entrusted, in the interests of our children,…to experienced individuals, secular or clerical.” Such an account not only seems to confirm accounts of the Bouka school’s inefficacy despite mandate officials’ high opinion of it, but also highlights the village’s interest in an agricultural school as long as it was directed by someone qualified. What

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743 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 144, “Enseignement technique, agricole, et professionnel,” Arida to Bounoure, 2 September 1938 and Bounoure to Arida, 8 September 1938.
745 CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 152, “Enseignement technique, professionnel, et agricole.” Most of the residents of Bsharri to the High Commissioner, 2 July 1939 and Most of the residents of Bsharri to the Counselor for Public Instruction, 2 July 1939.
constituted expertise, however, seems to have differed for villagers and mandate officials. It also raises questions about Bounoure’s reasons for denying the Greek Orthodox project assistance based on location since Bsharri’s position in the Qadisha valley does not seem particularly more conducive environmentally to an agricultural school.

This series of examples demonstrate a clear set of trends that characterized the implementation of infrastructure associated with disseminating “scientific” and “modern” agricultural expertise during the mandate. Despite being a frequently proclaimed essential tenet of imperial and nationalist development proposals, for most of the mandate such projects found little support unless they were French-run or could support themselves from their own, or heavily-surveilled foreign, resources. Political considerations even tended to trump the environmental suitability of a particular area for the purpose of agricultural experimentation. Furthermore to the extent that officials envisioned a role for agricultural education, they prioritized its pursuit at the elementary level to the children who would work primarily as farmers—they considered the need for institutions that would train more advanced agronomes a prerogative of the metropole. This focus on elementary education was a position which even technocratic nationalists such as Termanini eventually found themselves resigned to support, lest all backing for what they considered an essential aspect of national development be relinquished.

Conclusion

Despite the emphasis on technical and modern agricultural education in programs of imperial and national development, these projects remained a vexed question throughout the mandate—perhaps largely because within the mandate context mandate officials and local technocrats had highly divergent visions of the role they should play in these programs. In 1933,
Melle. Dannevig of the League of Nations engaged in a telling exchange with M. de Caix, France’s delegate to the Permanent Mandates Commission in Geneva, over the state of agricultural education in the region. She noted that “there exist few agricultural schools in this country, which is essentially agricultural.”\(^{746}\) He claimed that there was an aversion to “manual labor,” which inhibited technical education, to which she replied that she hoped “it will be possible to bring the population to better understand the importance of agricultural education as a means of improving the economic situation of the country.”\(^{747}\)

In contrast to this condescending view of matters, Syrians had quite a different perspective on the situation. As detailed above, a number of technocratically-minded locals clearly considered agricultural education essential to their nation’s economic development, but found efforts to expand it stymied by political and economic obstacles. According to both al-Zira‘a al-Haditha and the journal’s peasant interlocutors, there was no shortage of Syrians, whether fellah or effendi, who were willing to sweat in the service of agricultural production. Regarding the structure of this agricultural education, however, they envisioned a comprehensive, state-supported educational program that would fund schools, such as those at Selemiye, to train advanced experts to teach, inspect, and administer, while formulating village elementary agricultural education in such a way as to ensure peasants would remain on their land. French officials, on the other hand, prioritized agricultural education within Syria primarily for farmers working their land. Those desiring higher levels of expertise could gain it through institutions in the metropole, a highly mediated process of access that reinforced a hierarchy of expertise between the mandate and the metropole. In this scenario, mandate officials regarded the Selemiye school as “too elevated” because it produced students who wanted to go into

\(^{746}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 102, “Mandat français,” Appended to a Note dated 27 September 1933 ; Khoury, Syria and the French Mandate, 137.
\(^{747}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/2, 102, “Mandat français,” Appended to a Note dated 27 September 1933.
administration—according to mandate official assessments it should have offered simple courses to enlighten peasants without detaching them from the land. The prerogative to cultivate administrators trained in scientific agriculture was reserved for the metropole.

The physical process of disseminating scientific agricultural expertise raised interesting possibilities for transcending the boundaries between rural and urban spaces. Within the framework of the mandate, lack of state support as well as the region’s administrative-division into statelets posed a challenge to coordinating the kinds of centralized government initiatives or state-directed development programs that had characterized the late Ottoman period—much to local technocrats’ dismay. As a result, different actors responded to what they claimed was a perceived need for these programs to serve a variety of distinct, and often competing, interests. The result was a varied assortment of projects justified as conveying scientific expertise that could thus be (or at least be perceived to be) political programs aimed at also disseminating nationalist sentiments or foreign influence. Finally, these discursive justifications that targeted a distinction between “scientific” or “rational” practice and existing practices to justify these interventions tended to obscure the real difference involved in these new forms of agricultural practice—disparities of economy and access. Peasant farmers might have been intrigued by these agriculture-practicing effendis, but they were far more concerned about rain, crop prices, and access to markets than they were in the “science” of new methods or machinery.

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Chapter 5

OF MICE, SOUNÉ, DROUGHT, AND TAXATION:
THE PESTS OF AGRICULTURE AND THE CRISIS OF THE 1930s

If local technocrats and the mandate administration differed in their approaches to agricultural education, the mandate authority’s handling of other aspects of rural administration would also prove highly contentious. In particular, mandate approaches to the infrastructure associated with implementing new agricultural technologies, such as policies related to taxation, land reform, and agricultural credit, would prove a consistent source of tension. In the face of a number of environmental crises that compounded these policies’ disruptive effects, this tension would erupt in the 1930s as a drought and pest-stricken countryside found itself unable to respond to the demands of the mandate’s taxation regime or credit-lending institutions.

As I have done in previous chapters, I trace policies and projects related to technocratic networks of expertise grappling with how to implement new developments in agricultural technologies, while also delineating how a mandate-colonial approach that emphasized extraction for the metropole differed from that of local technocrats who saw them as tools for increasing local wealth. Both French and local technocrats, for instance, prioritized the mapping of a cadastre and a supposedly lighter and more equitable taxation system. However, while they agreed in principle on the agricultural reforms necessary to better exploit this key source of wealth, they differed over how the cadastre should be implemented and what constituted a fair taxation system. Local technocrats, in particular, insisted that extraction of that wealth depended on a substantial level of government investment alongside these infrastructural changes. French officials meanwhile appear to have been more concerned with how an “equitable” taxation

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749 Some of the material in this chapter was previously published in Elizabeth Williams, “Mapping the Cadastre, Producing the Fellah: Technologies and Discourses of Rule in French Mandate Syria and Lebanon,” in The Routledge Handbook of the History of the Middle East Mandates, eds., Cyrus Schayegh and Andrew Arsan (New York: Routledge, 2015), 170-182.
system would ensure that predictable, steady revenues found their way into the government’s coffers.\(^{750}\)

Despite the discourse of equity used to describe mandate tax collection policies and their accompanying project of cadastral mapping, these practices would elicit intense contestation from the local population. By the mid-1930s, crisis had hit the agricultural sphere as drought and other environmental calamities, the global economic crisis, and low market prices for key agricultural products created a number of problems for farmers.\(^{751}\) The linking of the Syrian pound to the French franc, which would experience a number of fluctuations during this period, heightened Syria’s exposure to these events and would remain a sensitive issue over the course of the mandate.\(^{752}\) The impacts of mandate policies given their emphasis on extraction and how their implementation intersected with local environmental vicissitudes and challenges are essential, but relatively understudied, components of nationalist discontent in the 1930s. In particular, it was these factors’ intersection with the inflexibility of the mandate’s “rationalized” taxation system that provoked the most intense outcry from peasants and landowners alike and bolstered nationalist organization at a crucial moment.

Mandate officials hailed their approaches to policies of rural administration, such as taxation and land reform, as rational and progressive. By exploring the practical experiences of these policies in mandate Syria, this chapter aims to expose the incoherence between the discursive justifications of mandate rule and its actual practice. It builds on Timothy Mitchell’s argument about “how one might understand the workings of these different forces [technology, science, etc.] in a way that avoids lending to any one of them a logic, energy, and coherence it

\(^{752}\) Khoury, *Syria*, 85-86, 480-1
I argue that mandate officials formulated and imposed agricultural policies in order to exploit Syria’s soil in the service of French financial and commercial interests with little regard for local conditions or aspirations. They pursued administrative practices that opened up land to capital investment and sought to maximize the revenues obtained from agriculture. Such practices operated in a mandate space structured as much as possible to benefit the metropole through policies such as the linking of the Syrian pound to the French franc, which experienced a number of fluctuations during this period. In contrast to a discourse that emphasized equity and justice, these policies would contribute to what Frederick Cooper has defined as an “unevenness” produced at the intersection of local and global spaces.

Local critiques meanwhile would work to expose this incoherence. In their response to mandate agricultural policies, peasants and elite nationalists underscored the hypocrisy of the language of progress, citing the injustice and lack of logic of mandate rule. In justifying and representing mandate technologies and projects as harbingers of equity, justice, and rationality, mandate officials explained away this contestation by producing a representation of its discursive “other”: Syria’s existing technologies and institutions as, according to mandate officials, antiquated, inefficient, insufficient or some combination of the three. Its peasants meanwhile were backwards, accustomed to violence, and oppressed by violent and unscrupulous landlords. Mandate administrators were merely objective arbiters attempting to intervene in this enduring struggle.

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754 For more details see Khoury, *Syria*, 85.
Despite agricultural development being an proclaimed cornerstone of mandate profitability, the trends that characterized its policies’ local impacts such as the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners, the increase in rural to urban flight, and unrest stemming from rural areas, most notably that embodied in the 1925-27 Syrian Revolt, belie a “pro-peasant strategy.” They also suggest that the countryside experienced some of the harsher impacts of mandate policies. Scholars have offered several reasons for this state of rural affairs. Thompson implies lower agricultural yields and peasant flight resulted from World War I and its aftermath, suggesting mandate officials intended “to bolster agricultural income in Syria” through plans to expand cotton cultivation and silk production, but “failed.” Khoury meanwhile recognizes the role of natural events (drought, winds, and frost) and the world economic crisis in the thirties as contributing factors to the deteriorating state of the agriculture sector. As a result of his emphasis on urban actors, however, he does not offer a more systematic critique of mandate policies’ role in exacerbating these crises. In fact, he is more intent to point out what he considers the failure of local elites to invest in agricultural infrastructure, claiming that “rarely did [landowning] families reinvest in the agricultural productivity of their lands or in agricultural-based industries.” He attributes this neglect to their preference for “exceedingly expensive pleasures” and proclivity for “conspicuous consumption.”

While these factors and the post-war moment perhaps contributed on some level, the following chapter argues that this state of agricultural affairs was a very real consequence of mandate administrative strategies. Instead of characterizing these policies as “failed,” I suggest

759 Khoury, Syria, 399.
760 Khoury, Syria, 446.
761 Khoury, Syria, 446, 447.
that James Ferguson’s argument about the more recent “‘development’ apparatus,” provides instructive insights—i.e. understanding these policies in terms of “what [they did], how [they did] it, and why.” In taking this approach, I demonstrate the productive capacity of these policies, exposing the cognitive dissonance between what they produced and what officials claimed they were producing. I consider the continuities and divergences between mandate administrative policies and those of the late Ottoman period, as well as approaches championed by French officials versus the ideas of local technocrats in order to more fully expound upon these discrepancies.

In doing so, I contribute to the existing scholarly work examining changes in land registration and taxation under the mandates, work that has tended to focus more on the British mandates of Transjordan and Palestine than on that of the French in Syria and Lebanon. Nonetheless, the work that has looked at aspects of these policies in Syria and Lebanon provides valuable insights into their impacts on common lands, land consolidation, and elite politics. Birgit Schaebler, for example, has examined the implications for musha‘, a form of commonly-held land tenure, in southern Syria while Abdullah Hanna has studied French mandate authorities’ “peasant-friendly” approach towards land ownership alongside the consolidation of

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land in the hands of large landowners. Philip Khoury discusses cadastre and taxation policies in order to contextualize the rural pressures that influenced elite strategies. He attributes the resistance of “conservative” and “suspicious” peasants to their being intent on preserving a “traditional way of life,” and, in the Jebel Druze in particular, acquiescing to the demands of their “feudal” lords. Michael Provence’s work on the 1925-27 Revolt has in turn successfully critiqued such a representation of peasant motivations in the Jebel Druze, arguing that characterizing Druze society as “feudal” is to perpetuate a French misrepresentation of Druze social relations. In this chapter, I build on this work to demonstrate though an examination of cadastre and taxation policies the imbrication of certain representations of the peasantry with a particular ideology of mandate rule and the simultaneous incoherence between this ideology’s accompanying rhetoric and the impact of mandate policies in rural areas. By examining the material impacts of this incoherence between mandate agricultural policies and its representation of those policies exposed both by desperate peasants fleeing their land as well as elite technocratic critiques, I argue that mandate officials’ insistence on imposing technologies of rule that failed to take into account local environmental conditions and management practices was central to this discontent.

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766 Provence, Revolt, 14, 38. Both Khoury and Provence refer to Jacques Weulersse’s dense, thorough study of the Syrian peasantry, but Provence is careful to point out that Weulersse worked from the assumption that all of Syria “was dominated by large estates and feudal exploitation” (Provence, Revolt, 156). Hanna Batatu’s book on the Syria peasantry also includes a short section on the mandate, although it primarily focuses on the post-independence period. See Batatu, Syria’s Peasantry.
French Discourse and Mandate Policies

In order to contextualize mandate officials’ ideas of “progress” for Syria, a brief consideration of how scholars in the metropole conceived of progress within France itself during the post-war moment is instructive. In 1920, Albert Demangeon, a scholar of human geography at the Sorbonne, published *Le Déclin de l’Europe* [The Decline of Europe] in which he described the stakes of the post-war situation and stressed the importance of maintaining France’s economic strength in the face of other rising economic powers like the United States and Japan. Demangeon laid out his recommendations for how to keep France “a rich and powerful member of the European community” as follows: “have lots of men, derive the most that it could from the land, make machines, extend its sea commerce, engage the colonies in the national effort.” In particular, improving the state of French agricultural production figured prominently in his suggestions. “Progress [in France]” he admitted, “had proceeded slowly, but happily *motoculture* seems to have won its case.” Ironically, given the emphasis of mandate officials on France’s prowess in *motoculture*, Demangeon declared that it was not widespread enough in the metropole, urging the country to take inspiration from the success of machines in the United States and more recently Britain. Although apparently the proponents of “scientific” agriculture had prevailed, he suggested significant changes were still necessary to facilitate more extensive use of these machines. In particular, he insisted that in order for them to fulfill their promise in France, the common practice of farming land in small parcels needed reform as it posed a grave obstacle to mechanized farming—i.e. *remembrement*, or the

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768 Demangeon, *Déclin*, 294.
769 Demangeon, *Déclin*, 299.
770 Demangeon, *Déclin*. 
consolidation of slim parcels of land, needed to be undertaken. Remembrement constituted a central goal of mapping the cadastre.

After securing the mandate in 1920—the same year Demangeon published his book—French officials prioritized the establishment of a Régie de travaux du cadastre et d’amélioration foncière. The Régie was a semi-private company that reported to the French High Commission, but the various statelets that France had created in Syria paid for its work. Its purported goal was the fundamental transformation of the local system of land tenure and property ownership. This transformation of “long duration” aimed, officials claimed, at making “property ownership more accessible to the cultivator, to the fellah” and would be “obvious proof [of what] our presence here signifies: movement towards progress.”

In addition to mapping out and assessing the values of the region’s most productive agricultural land and undertaking their remembrement, among this enterprise’s primary goals was the division and reapportioning (démembrement) of musha‘ lands, lands held in common by members of rural communities. As Jacques Weulersse, a member of L’Institute Français de Damas from 1932-1938 and a protégé of Demangeon as well as the author of an often-quoted book on the Syrian peasantry wrote: the mapping of the cadastre would enable “a new property tax (tax foncière), calculated in the European way (à l’européenne) on the lands themselves; equality is henceforth guaranteed before the tax (l’impôt) between rich and poor.” Cadastres, such as the compoix in southern France or the tahrir defterleri and defter-i hakâni of the Ottoman Empire, had existed in various forms for centuries, but the process of mapping the cadastre developed in the nineteenth and twentieth-century required special training in complex

771 Demangeon, Déclin, 299, 300.
772 Weulersse, Paysans, 188.
773 See for example, Achard, “La Syrie,” 164.
774 See Schaebler, “Practicing Musha’: Common Lands” for a nuanced discussion of this form of land tenure.
calculations and the use of sophisticated instruments. The maps produced centralized and reified knowledge of land ownership. Whereas before, knowledge of the cadastre had been largely produced and maintained locally, now “experts” who were often strangers came to villages and used special instruments to measure and map. These maps aimed to account for every bit of cultivable land.

The resulting cadastre served a number of purposes—it ensured that all productive land could be assigned a tax value and thus potentially provide revenue; it could provide the basis for consolidating small parcels of land, making them more amenable to the use of large, recently-invented, mechanized agricultural implements; and it could divide common lands and assign individual ownership, opening this land to capital exploitation as these individual owners could now take out loans on their property. French officials viewed the first and second as crucial for extracting the revenues they sought from Syrian territory; the third would allow French capital to make inroads into the Syrian countryside. In order of priority, the steps in this process proposed by the mandate’s agricultural counselor M. Achard, were as follows: apportioning out collective property to individuals, dividing undivided estates, démembrement of state lands, and finally breaking up large property into small property.

The Ottoman government of course had their own system of land registration in place for revenue collection and, as discussed in chapter one, were on the verge of starting to divide and assign individual ownership of musha’, or commonly-held lands, in the name of agricultural

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777 Mitchell, *Experts*, 80-119, especially 89-90, in which he describes the process and how it could bring unregistered land to light.

progress when World War I broke out. Although Weulersse would disparage Ottoman land registration as “confusing,” mandate officials considered Camille Duraffourd, the man who they engaged as the Régisseur, or director, of the Régie, exceptionally qualified for the job because he had completed a stage in Istanbul at the end of 1919 at the general direction of the Cadastre in the Ottoman Empire. He declared in his application for the post that this experience “permitted [him] to expand [his] knowledge relative to this service in general, and more particularly to that which concerns the property regime in Turkey and its relative laws.” Those who supported his application clearly considered such knowledge valuable, citing in his favor his “thorough knowledge of the Ottoman legislation concerning questions of property, the laws and rules of the Ottoman cadastre, [and] the geographic services of the Ottoman army.”

Under Duraffourd’s tireless administration, the Régie established a rigorous system for the démembrement of musha’ lands. Like the Ottoman bureaucrats discussed in chapter one, mandate officials deplored this form of land tenure as inimical to “the progress of agriculture” and spoke of “the hindrance caused by this mode of tenure to agricultural credit” and “to the free exercise of right of property.” While a scholar of Syrian peasants like Weulersse would acknowledge the “complexity of rights” and “the antiquity of disputes” that governed the use of musha’ lands, he dismissed them as irritating obstacles to progressive reform and hailed the process of reorganizing and redistributing land in a way that ran roughshod over these claims as

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780 Weulersse, Paysans, 187; CADN/Syrie-Liban/3, Direction du personnel, box 59, folder “Camille Duraffourd.”
781 CADN/Syrie-Liban/3, Direction du personnel, box 59, folder “Camille Duraffourd.”
782 CADN/Syrie-Liban/3, Direction du personnel, box 59, folder “Camille Duraffourd.”
783 For a booklet summarizing this plan see CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 870, “Notice sur le démembrement et l’aménagement des terres “mouchaa” possédées dans l’indivision collective,” although undated it was produced sometime after 1935, most likely in 1936 for the Foire-Exhibition in Damascus.
“liberating” it for “modern individual exploitation.” As Mitchell has observed, the universalizing logic attributed to the progress embodied by such a project hid “the ad hoc, violent, and exceptional character of the law of property.” Indeed, a number of Syrian peasants strenuously resisted these reforms, and their fears about the consequences appear to have been justified. Their “traditional way of life,” as Khoury describes it, was what afforded them certain protections through collective land exploitation arrangements that shielded them from the depredations of powerful large landowners. Thus, despite rhetoric that claimed to be primarily interested in ensuring the rights of small property owners, French administrative policies primarily worked to produce a system of land ownership recognizable, legible, and exploitable through circulations of international, especially French, capital. As discussed in chapter 3, from the outset, French capitalized banks were anxious to get legislation in place that would protect their interests. As a result, mandate land registration practices appear to have had the opposite effect of creating small property owners, leading instead to the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners who were far better placed to take advantage of credit-lending institutions.

787 See for example Khoury, *Syria*, 64, 157.
788 Even French officials, when it suited their purposes, recognized that collective land ownership, *musha’*, “permitted fellahs to resist the influence of large urban landowners:” Jacques Weulersse, *L’Oronte: Étude de fleuve* (Tours: Arrault et Cie, Maîtres Imprimeurs, 1940), 71.
789 MAE, Syrie-Liban 72, “Note Jointe…,” June 24, 1921, p.155-59. According to a cadastral report from 1922, “it is not without interest to note that the French establishments of credit, previously or newly created, were the principal beneficiaries of loan operations on mortgages, of which the country had a pressing need to improve its commercial and agricultural situation.” CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 388, “Notice sur les Services Fonciers de Syrie,” 5.
790 Khoury, *Syria*, 64-65; Khuder Zakarya, “Syria,” in *Commoners, Climbers and Notables*, ed. C. Van Nieuwenhuijze (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 250-51. Zakarya estimates that small landholdings fell from 25% to 15% during the mandate based on the research of al-Siba’i. See Badr al-Din al-Siba’i, *Adwa’ al-ra’is mal al-ajnabi fi suriya, 1850-1958* [Lights on foreign capital in Syria, 1850-1958] (Damascus: Dar al-Jamahir, 1968). See also Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 54. Khoury, *Syria*, 65, indicates that in the Aleppo province, small landholdings fell 33% to 16% from 1924-1944, while in Homs 55% of private property was held by large landowners while in Hama four families owned 92% of the area’s 114 villages. Although more research is necessary to determine exactly how this consolidation happened, it is worth noting that the regions often cited as being the most consolidated by large landowners (Hama, Aleppo, and Homs) largely coincide with those areas where the cadastral was most thoroughly mapped during the mandate. Areas that were not mapped or that were mapped less intensively or later in the process (Hawran, Jabal Druze, Latakia) tended to maintain a greater degree of small peasant ownership. See Joel Beinin,
As Weulersse would assess the situation in the final years of the mandate, peasants found themselves unable to defend their “new rights.”

Ultimately, the progress exemplified by the cadastre was not only supposed to manifest in its creation of small peasant landowners, but also through its provision of a basis for a more equitable (and a more consistently profitable) system of taxation. The French narrative of progress that envisioned a countryside of small private property owners each being taxed according to the value of their now capital-legible property required the production of its other—an unjust and oppressive Ottoman tax system. The Ottomans levied two main taxes under their system—one, the property tax (l’impôt foncier or werko/wirgho), was assessed on the value of the soil, the other, the tithe (dîme or a ’shar), consisted of a percentage of the harvest’s value. Despite, as we have seen, local support for the tithe because of its sensitivity to the region’s wide annual variations in agricultural production, French officials excoriated this system and its methods of collection as particularly prone to inaccuracy and abuse. They pointed out that villages composed of small property owners had to pay disproportionately more than villages protected by powerful landlords. Furthermore, they denigrated the methods of collection as risky—the harvested crops had to be left in a communal space exposed to theft and fire and delaying their arrival at market—and harsh, claiming that tax farmers used tactics that were “odious vexations for the farmer.” The cadastre-based system of taxation, which Weulersse

Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 120; compare the map from CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 872, “Rapport Relatif aux Travaux du Cadastre et d’Amélioration Foncière Effectués en 1940.”

Weulersse, Paysans, 196.


Haut-Commissariat, Liban en 1922, 225.

Weulersse, Paysans, 195.

Weulersse, Paysans, 195; Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en Syrie et au Liban, La Syrie et le Liban sous l’Occupation et le Mandat Français, 1919-1927 (Nancy : Berger-Levrault, 1929), 236. See also Batatu, Syria’s Peasantry, 61.
would characterize as “à l’européenne,” French officials insisted, would be a more equitable alternative.\textsuperscript{796}

In particular, the cadastral survey would provide the basis for reform through a systematic assessment of land value. Early estimations promised windfall revenue—tripling current intakes.\textsuperscript{797} However, given that a cadastre-based tax would take some years to come into effect, French officials sought a stop-gap measure to ensure steady revenues while it was being completed. Their solution was a version of the tithe called the \textit{terbih}.\textsuperscript{798} Officials had calculated this tax, established in May 1925, on an average of crop values from each village for the years 1921-1924.\textsuperscript{799} Officials deemed this system, like that of private property, laudable because, they claimed, it would encourage initiative—anything produced above the allotted tax amount would be exempt just as improvements put into a piece of privately-owned land would accrue to the benefit of the owner.\textsuperscript{800}

In practice, however, the rigidity of this tax caused any number of problems as it could not account for the inevitable vicissitudes in agricultural production. In 1933, a complaint from Idlib signed with 157 seals and 68 signatures exemplified the system’s flaws. The petition explained that some inhabitants who had property had since sold it and become poorer, others had since become property owners. In some areas olive trees had been uprooted while elsewhere others had been planted and yet each individual and every grove continued to be taxed as if nothing had changed since 1925.\textsuperscript{801} Another 1934 complaint from Ras Ba‘albak asserted that the very inequalities in taxation due to influential local leaders that French officials claimed to be

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{796} Weulersse, \textit{Paysans}, 196.
\item \textsuperscript{797} Haut-Commissariat, \textit{Liban en 1922}, 225.
\item \textsuperscript{798} Weulersse, \textit{Paysans}, 196; Haut-Commissariat, \textit{Liban sous l’Occupation}, 236.
\item \textsuperscript{799} Haut-Commissariat, \textit{Liban sous l’Occupation}, 236.
\item \textsuperscript{800} Haut-Commissariat, \textit{Liban sous l’Occupation}, 236.
\item \textsuperscript{801} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Plaints des habitants d'Idlib a/s des impôts,” December 20, 1933.
\end{itemize}
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trying to eradicate actually became enshrined in the fixed tax, making it impossible to pay, especially with deficient harvests.\textsuperscript{802} Furthermore, despite no longer raising silkworms since 1929, the villagers complained that they were still assessed a tax of 35,000 piasters for the cocoon harvest.\textsuperscript{803} There were also no allowances made in this supposedly more progressive tax system to deal with annual fluctuations in environmental conditions—1921-1924 happened to be particularly good years and no amount of initiative could replace the benefits bestowed by a good rainfall. Officials did not address what was to be done in a drought year or a series of drought years when farmers, despite their best efforts, might be quite incapable of amassing a fixed tax amount calculated on the basis of several years of good harvests and high market prices. Yet such a consideration was of paramount importance, especially in certain areas under the mandate, as agricultural yields, given the wide variations in annual rainfall and the prevalence in many areas of rainfed cultivation, could vary drastically from year to year.

\textbf{A Local Technocratic Perspective}

Syrian technocrats were also intent on increasing wealth extraction from agricultural production through reforms that would break up \textit{musha’}, provide possibilities for additional investment, and create a new tax system. In contrast to French officials, however, they also emphasized that given the greater costs involved in new technologies and methods, agriculture would first need significant investment and, at least temporarily, lighter taxes before the impacts of the anticipated increased production could take effect.\textsuperscript{804} While I have not been able to access

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{802} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête de Mgr Abou Assaly relative à la perception des impôts,” 13 October 1934.
\bibitem{803} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête de Mgr Abou Assaly relative à la perception des impôts,” 13 October 1934. The head of the Services Spéciaux in Ba‘albuk, Captaine Desfarges, wrote to suggest someone could come investigate but in his opinion Ras Ba‘albuk was not being taxed out of proportion with the rest of the Bekaa (CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Doléances des habitants de Ras Ba‘albuk a/s/ des impost,” Desfarges to the delegate of the High Commission for the Lebanese Republic, 24 October 1934).
\end{thebibliography}
local government documents from this period, I have pieced together, through a series of articles published in the Hama-based agricultural journal *al-Zira’a al-Haditha*, a number of policies proposed by local technocrats, many of whom would be employed by different ministries with remits that included agriculture-related projects over the course of the mandate.

As discussed in chapter three, the educational trajectories and careers of some of the journal’s main contributors suggest that had political matters been different the policies proposed in the journal represent those that would have directed state economic planning. While some of the contributors do seem to have exercised some influence on government policies under the mandate, they would find efforts to fully pursue their visions for state-directed planning frustrated by the mandate administrative apparatus. Their resistance would even lead to various French officials labeling them as extremists or “Francophobe.”⁸⁰⁵ Many of the technocratic ideas they espoused regarding agrarian reform at least superficially resembled those of their French counterparts. Nonetheless, a closer examination reveals key points of difference that would produce friction from the mandate’s inception—a tension that would eventually lead to an eruption in frustration at the consequences of mandate policies. Local technocratic proposals, like those of mandate officials, also emphasized unburdening the peasant, more equitably distributing tax collection, and mapping a cadastre, but they also stressed that this process should be sensitive to local dynamics, undertaken in a financially prudent manner relative to the region’s resources, and backed by ample government support.

Government assistance and encouragement for agriculture was central to their project. They backed their proposals with frequent references to other countries, such as France, Switzerland or Turkey, in which various measures had been taken by governments to encourage

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⁸⁰⁵ See for example, CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 953, “Nationalistes Damas Information,” Collet, 20 March 1928 in which Mustafa al-Shihabi is listed as a “Francophobe.”
agriculture and shift some or even most of the burden of taxation away from it. Al-Ahdab described how in France smaller farmers with incomes less than 2000 francs were not required to pay taxes, those making more than 4000 francs paid only half the codified tax, and the “masters of large resources” were only charged eight percent interest on their net profit. Yet, he insisted, they still used agricultural journals and their government representatives to complain about high taxes. Meanwhile in Switzerland, peasants who found themselves in financial difficulty had recourse to cooperative societies that would loan them money at no more than four percent interest. Another article highlighted how by 1932 just across the border in the part of the former Ottoman Empire that was now Turkey, taxation had shifted primarily to a consumption tax with most agricultural taxes abolished. In Syria, in contrast, agriculture would continue to be taxed in some form for the duration of the mandate and these various policies would provoke ongoing contestation.

The existing agricultural taxation system in Syria, which, at the commencement of the mandate, was still based on the a ‘shar or tithe, assessed at 12.5% on the gross harvest, also came in for early criticism from local technocrats. However, their criticisms emanated from a different basis than those of French administrators. Atallah for example emphasized the region’s need for flexible taxation policies that took into account yearly changes in environmental factors. He also stressed the efforts of estimation committees to adjudicate a just tithe amount each year, but noted that expecting an increased tithe amount every year would lead to injustice and mistreatment of the peasant. Al-Ahdab wrote initially in support of a fixed tax like the terbih

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808 “al-Dara’ib al-Zira’iya” al-Zira’a al-Haditha 5:5 (March 1932): 332. This is actually an excerpt from the journal al-Hayat al-Zirai‘ya, 1:3.
based on an average of four years’ harvests but made it contingent on lowering taxes on peasants to 10% on non-net harvests.\textsuperscript{811} Within a few months he had revised this initial plan suggesting instead that the tax should be based on an average of five years, namely 1911, 1912, 1913, 1920, and 1921, and this tax should then be used for 10 years in order to avoid the costs involved in estimation.\textsuperscript{812} Tellingly, his main concern was about reducing expenses associated with the process of tax collection while French officials saw the benefits of such a system in the fixed tax receipts it was supposed to ensure the budget. Furthermore until the cadastre had been produced and the fellah had been able to invest in “their lands according to the methods of modern science [asalib al-fann al-hadith],” he urged the government to generally reduce taxes and fees impacting agriculture and farmers.\textsuperscript{813} In addition to substituting a fixed 10% tax for the tithe and property taxes, he suggested excusing the peasant from taxes such as the road, entrance, and poll taxes. Furthermore, while he wanted to encourage small property ownership, he urged the exemption of peasants from registration fees and the taking of “effective measures to prevent the fellah from selling his land and his help(?) so that he is not forced to sell his land when he ends up in extreme financial distress.”\textsuperscript{814}

Al-Shihabi, on the other hand, criticized the tithe because of its failure to accommodate the dictates of scientific agriculture, which necessitated capital investment. If musha’ posed an obstacle to capital investment, the tithe failed to take into account any investment made. As long as it continued to be assessed on non-net yields, it discouraged a fellah from making the investments required by “scientific” practice since it was liable to take a greater percentage of their net profits (i.e. after their investments were subtracted from the revenue of the harvest) than

\textsuperscript{811} Al-Ahdab, “al-Hala,” 15.
\textsuperscript{814} Al-Ahdab, “al-Dara’ib 2,” 466.
those of the *fellahin* who didn’t bother to pursue “scientific” methods. “It is no surprise,” he concluded “then if the masters of agriculture (irbab al-zira’ā) prefer to follow the old ways in exploiting their land and say that the *a’shar* is among the greatest reasons that prevent the progress of agriculture and its improvement in our country.” As a secondary issue, al-Shihabi also raised concerns about “mistakes” made by estimation committees, the exposure of the crop on the threshing floor to theft and fire, and the delay in threshing sometimes entailed by waiting for estimators. He also noted the irony of how the tax was assessed in a year of drought. Drought raised the likelihood of increased market prices, which it appears would be the basis for the estimation of the tax, meaning that peasants could be assessed more tax in a drought year despite the fact that yields were presumably lower.

Despite these concerns, the *terbih*, he maintained, was a “corrupt” (*fasid*) solution because not only would it be unjust in a year when it rained less, but it was also based on non-net returns and replicated the existing inequalities in the previous system—villages that had been protected by powerful landowners from paying the state an *a’shar* equivalent to non-protected villages retained their privilege. Like French officials, he insisted the ultimate goal was a land tax (*al-dariba al-‘aqariya*) based on rent, or net revenue, although for him its primary benefit was that it would ensure the fellah would retain invested capital. Such a tax, he insisted, would also be suitable for local environmental conditions such as the years of drought that could affect eastern regions or the losses caused by locusts, *souné* or other pests, although he did not elaborate on this point.

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815 Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na,” 9-10. It is interesting that at this point in his speech he switches from referring to the *fellah*, which had been the primary actor in his narrative until now, to the *irbab al-zira’ā*, which literally means “masters of agriculture,” but seems to be used primarily when referring to large landowners.
816 Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na,” 10-11.
817 Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na,” 11.
818 Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na,” 12.
In conjunction with these changes to the taxation system, local technocrats also stressed the importance of creating small property ownership. They looked to examples for how this had been implemented in countries as diverse as Ireland (the Gladstone plan), the United States, Australia, Germany, Russia, Bosnia, Romania, and France and the impact of landownership among primarily small and middling farmers in Belgium and Bulgaria.\(^{819}\) Suggesting that the Ottoman had started this process during the era of the Tanzimat, Syrian technocrats expressed a desire to pursue peasant ownership of state lands and eventually land in the hands of big landowners, although the latter they admitted was a more delicate process.\(^{820}\)

Al-Shihabi, as director of state lands, was particularly influential in pursuing this reform, which he claimed to have studied for fourteen years, i.e. since essentially before World War I. During this time he had become convinced that land remaining in the hands of large landowners or the state was not conducive to the progress of agriculture.\(^{821}\) Thus, in 1927, under al-Shihabi’s watch, five villages were sold in the Hawran and two each in Homs and Hama. In 1928, forty villages—half in Homs and Hama and half in Aleppo—were sold. He insisted that this would continue until all villages on state land, ninety percent of which were worked by fellahin, the rest by middling farmers, had been sold.\(^{822}\) While he acknowledged concerns about the ability of these newly-made property owners to hold on to their property he insisted that decision 275 under which these sales were being made enabled the director of the department of state lands to prevent the buyer from selling, renting, or mortgaging land for a number of years so that it would not fall into the hands of large landowners. Thus the plan was to keep selling villages and hope


\(^{820}\) Al-Jaza’iri, “al-Islah al-Zira’i,” 430; Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiya wa talafiha” Zira’ a al-Haditha 4:3 (January 1928(9?)): 34.

\(^{821}\) Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiya wa talafiha” Zira’ a al-Haditha 4:3 (January 1928(9?)): 30.

\(^{822}\) Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiya wa talafiha” Zira’ a al-Haditha 4:3 (January 1928(9?)): 33.
for rain! Unfortunately, al-Shihabi’s optimism was misplaced. Not only would the years following 1928 bring with them some of the worst drought in living memory, but statistics suggest that large landowners were able to consolidate more land under their control, although the mechanics of this process remain murky.

In addition to creating small property ownership, local technocrats also supported the production of a mapped cadastre. However, while it was a legislative priority, they emphasized the need for the government to offset its costs and proceed at a pace whereby the financial burden of producing it would not overwhelm the country given its current economic situation. Musha’ in particular came in for criticism as al-Zira’a al-Haditha claimed it contributed to the “paralysis” of agriculture and led “the peasant to inertia and idleness.” Like French officials, the journal considered one of the key benefits of breaking up musha’ would be the capacity it provided the farmer to take out loans. Where they seemed to differ, on the other hand, regarded the level of security that the government should provide to ensure that peasants who did become indebted would have some recourse that would protect them from losing their land.

Many of the issues these technocrats cautioned against as well as others would become points of contestation for rural communities and landlords alike as the cadastral commissions set about their work in a number of villages. Indeed, people from all sectors of society appear to have strenuously opposed mandate-era land reform efforts. One report notes that in many

823 Al-Shihabi, “Aham adwa’na al-iqtisadiya wa talafiha” Zira’a al-Haditha 4:3 (January 1928(9?)): 33-4.
824 See al-Siba’i, Adwa’.
827 “al-Shiyua’ fi al-Bariya,” 405.
828 See for example, Khoury, Syria, 64, 157.
cases local peasants refused to show up to demonstrate their claims.\(^{829}\) In another instance, landlords upset by what the British consul described as “a cadastral restriction of their land usurpations” murdered three French cadastral workers.\(^{830}\) Another group of landowners was so shocked by the costs quoted them for mapping the cadastre of their lands that they insisted they were more inclined to sell their land for half the amount instead.\(^{831}\)

Villages from the Membij area near Aleppo complained that estimators had surveyed and registered their land, which had been part of the Çiftlikat-i Hümayun under the Ottomans and had now become part of the state domains under the mandate, in their names at inflated prices of 10 Syrian pounds. This amount, they noted, was even more than that of neighboring villages that had irrigated fields, pastures, and summer and winter harvests.\(^{832}\) They insisted it was exaggerated because they had not been present when it was made. To counter the “reforms” of the director of state domains in the region and support their claim they submitted a statement signed by a number of local mukhtars and imams who attested on the basis of their “knowledge, observation, erudition and expertise” that the villages’ land were rainfed, the soil rocky, and that three dunums of it was not valued at more than one Syrian pound.\(^{833}\) In addition to highlighting potential inequalities in the evaluation process, their complaint suggests they had a different concept from government officials of what qualified as appropriate expertise for determining accurate land values.

\(^{830}\) UKNA, FO 406.56, “Further Correspondence respecting Eastern Affairs, Part XVII,” July-December 1925.
\(^{832}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 831, “Reclamation des habitants,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 9 August 1930; Villagers to the High Commissioner, 21 July 1930.
\(^{833}\) CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 831, “Reclamation des habitants,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 21 July 1930; Mukhtars, Imams, and villagers to the High Commissioner, 26 July 1930. I did not find a reply to this petition in the archives.
In another instance, villagers feared that an attempt by a local notable from Homs who had requested the cadastral service to delimit an area of land that had been in litigation between two villages in the region would hurt their claims in the case.\textsuperscript{834} Another letter from Homs expressed alarm at the abolition of representative counsels and their replacement with one judge for adjudicating matters related to cadastral disputes. Signed with 62 signatures, the letter writers insisted that “most of the judges designated as presidents of the Commissions [for the work of the cadastre] have neither the experience nor the competence desired to judge the affairs of the cadastre and of delimitation, especially given that the older registers are obscure and demand, in order to be understood, much reflection and capacity.”\textsuperscript{835} Not only did the cadastre centralize and reify local knowledge, but given the structure of the process under the mandate it threatened to do so in a way that did not even make a good faith effort to accurately record that local knowledge in the first place.

A series of petitions from the village of Deir Baalba near Homs encapsulated the various issues raised by the new cadastral system—from the disruption of what were locally considered the benefits of lot redistribution to the expenses involved to the negligence of local knowledge. Threatened with the imminent division of their lands, some 100 farmers requested the High Commissioner to intervene to “maintain the former state of things” whereby the village’s land was “redistributed once every ten years…by the drawing of lots.”\textsuperscript{836} Contrary to mandate officials’ claims, they argued that this system allowed “cultivators to profit, during this time, from the fruits of their labor, different plots to be improved one after the other, and the poor to be

\textsuperscript{834} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des habitants de Taldo,” 15 October 1940. The French deputy delegate to the region insisted that there was no need to respond as “the operations were legitimate.”
\textsuperscript{835} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 955, “Demande de maintien des functions des membres des conseils administratifs,” 10 February 1932. They noted that if mandate authorities were concerned about making economies in the budget they would do better to “abolish many other functions that are useless and the holders of which do not furnish any work.”
\textsuperscript{836} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” November 13, 1934.
helped and assisted by the rich.”\textsuperscript{837} They emphasized that the lands of their village “are not of the same value. Some are good and close and some are mediocre and remote by nearly 10 km.”\textsuperscript{838} Perhaps in an effort to appeal to the mandate state’s emphasis on revenues, the petitioners insisted that the division would lead villagers who receive inferior lands to abandon them because they were not near their homes and thus they could not protect their crops from pastoralists and others who might pass by. Finally, they complained of the high costs of the division, which the villagers were expected to pay and which the petitioners claim amounted to more than the value of their lands, when the village was already severely indebted.\textsuperscript{839}

In 1937 and 1938 they wrote again to complain that the mukhtar was using the cadastre to have lands registered in his name.\textsuperscript{840} The petitioners also cited a tradition in which lands were recorded in the name of the oldest son, but worked by all. They noted that when the cadastral commission carried out their operations they did not consult with the council of elders and they had, as a result, registered all lands worked by multiple brothers under one name. In consequence mortgages taken out on what should have been a portion of the property were taken out on all of it.\textsuperscript{841} Despite imploring the French High Commissioner to protect their claims to these lands that had been theirs “for more than 500 years without contest” and on which they had paid all taxes and usage fees, the delegate of the High Commission wrote that it was not possible to respond.\textsuperscript{842} Such an example suggests the inaccuracies based on power dynamics and the failure to take into account local particularities that became enshrined in the cadastral registers.

\textsuperscript{837} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” November 13, 1934.
\textsuperscript{838} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” November 13, 1934.
\textsuperscript{839} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” November 13, 1934.
\textsuperscript{840} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 18 September 1937.
\textsuperscript{841} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 18 September 1937.
\textsuperscript{842} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 979, “Requête des villageois de Deir Baalba,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 15 March 1938; Delegate of the High Commission for the Syrian Republic to Martel, 13 May 1938.
The Politics of Mandate Administration and the Crisis of the 1930s

Under the mandate, implementation, given official priorities, overwhelmingly emphasized the extractive aspects of reforms over those of government assistance. As the consequences of this administrative approach unfolded, the tone of local technocrats became more and more critical. Al-Ahdab announced in early 1927 that the terbih, which had been assessed in 1924, 1925, and 1926, had not been applied in the spirit in which it was molded.\(^843\) There was an attempt to modify the assessment of the tithe in 1927 by replacing it with a tax based on rental income, but this proved challenging as it needed a fixed base for assessment such as land rent. This was not readily available given the prevalence of farm labor based on usufruct rights or tenant farming arrangements and the annual fluctuations in agricultural income due to harvest size and changing crop prices.\(^844\)

One particular cause for concern, given the nature of the fixed tax, were the various animals that wreaked havoc on crops starting especially in the mid-1920s. Some were known quantities such as locusts and field mice, but another, which proved to be particularly devastating to wheat cultivation, was the less well-known souné. While it had been observed in the region in 1911 and to some extent thereafter, it had done relatively little damage, but in 1924 it returned in force, wiping out large amounts of the wheat crop.\(^845\) Appearing northwest of Hama and southwest of Ma’arat al-Nu’man on 800,000 dönüms, it led to a loss of 182,500 gold Ottoman liras.\(^846\) Samples were sent to France for analysis and al-Zira’a al-Haditha promised to report on

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the results, but the main suggestions the journal offered its readers came from a series of experiments carried out at the Selemiye agricultural school with different kinds of wheat.\footnote{Hilmi Barudi, “Hasharat al-suna,” 39; Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Zira’a al-Hinta fi Munatiq al-Suna,” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 3:4 (May 1927): 228.}

\textit{Souné} inflicted the most damage on wheat because of the way in which its overwintering cycle coincided with the stages of the ripening wheat. Because barley ripened earlier it was less susceptible.\footnote{Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Zira’a al-Hinta,” 228.} While the insect did not affect a number of other plants, notably sorghum, which was a possible alternative, at all, the journal noted it was difficult for the peasant to give up wheat, which was more remunerative.\footnote{Barudi, “Hasharat al-suna,” 40; Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Zira’a al-Hinta fi Munatiq al-Suna,” 228; Hilmi Barudi, “Hasharat al-suna wa tanawub al-zuru’” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 3:1 (February 1927): 26.} Initial attempts to control the pest focused on planting early-maturing wheat varieties and harvesting them before they were ripe—this saved a portion, but was not entirely satisfactory.\footnote{Barudi, “Hasharat al-suna,” 40.} Thus the goal was to find a wheat variety that matured at a time comparable to that of barley. Meanwhile local technocrats suggested that farmers focus on growing barley, sorghum, and chickpeas in their rotations—the latter two in particular not being susceptible.\footnote{Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Zira’a al-Hinta,” 228-230; Hilmi Barudi, “Hasharat al-suna wa tanawub al-zuru’” \textit{al-Zira’a al-Haditha} 3:1 (February 1927).} Whether due to this advice or to farmers’ responding to their own observations, by 1927 French officials were observing a “very notable” shift to barley cultivation in the areas that had been “overwhelmed by the ‘souné’” in 1926.\footnote{CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, “Agriculture 1927-1928,” Report by Achard entitled “Les emblavures de Blé et d’Orge de la campagne agricole 1926-1927,” 15 February 1927.}

Following experiments on a number of wheat varieties brought from “hot lands” that were started in 1925 at the Selemiye school, the journal announced to its readership in May 1927 that the experiments had ascertained that a variety of wheat called Hindiye, which had been brought from the Algerian Agricultural Institute, proved the most promising.\footnote{Tawfiq al-Ahdab, “Zira’a al-Hinta,” 228.} It reached
maturity on the 23rd of May, while the souné did its worst damage in very late May (starting around the 25th) and early June. Sometimes however the pest would attack early (between 20 March and 10 April) and then move on to other fields—the solution tried by farmers in these areas, as they communicated it to the journal, involved planting wheat that matured late, although this strategy would only be successful in areas where the soil retained moisture well. Including details about the preferred varieties, the journal encouraged its readers to experiment with them in souné-afflicted areas. Thus the journal served not only to convey information obtained through experiments at the school, but also to disseminate observations made by its readers in a variety of areas to other parts of its readership.

In addition to circulating knowledge about how to combat new pests, the journal also offered suggestions for more well-known ones. For example, it provided tips on how to deal with field mice—urging locals not to kill their natural predators such as snakes and discussing at least five techniques that could be used to reduce their numbers, indicating that it had found one involving the blowing of red pepper-laced smoke into their dens to be the most effective. After additional experiments it also described the success of techniques using arseniate soda and another using gas (ghaz). In trying to minimize the impact of these animals on production, the journal stressed the need for coordination and government assistance to make these efforts successful as both mice and souné could easily spread from field to field, significantly impacting whole regions.

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Both of these elements were also considered crucial in the fight against locusts. Albeit a well-known pest in the region, the distances locusts could cover and the breadth of cropped territory these insects could munch their way through meant that coordination was necessary on an international scale. In the eastern Mediterranean this ironically meant among “nations” whose territory had for the most part, just a decade earlier, all been part of the Ottoman Empire. While local technocrats held an International Locust Conference and established an International Locust School to determine how best to combat them, the Agriculture Ministry paid students from the Selemiye school, in the absence of sufficient “technical” employees, to travel to areas from Syria’s southern border to Deir al-Zor to participate in the fight.\textsuperscript{858}

Despite these efforts, the journal complained about the lack of adequate equipment to take on the insects in a truly “scientific” manner. It offered a very pointed critique comparing the measures taken to combat locusts in Algeria with those afforded to farmers in Syria, which highlighted local efforts and decried the mandate’s failure to support them with the “scientific” means it had made available in plentiful supply for the fight against them in other areas under French governance.\textsuperscript{859} It is difficult to pinpoint whether increased coordination, more “scientific” equipment, or additional government assistance would have significantly protected crop yields. Nonetheless, ongoing complaints about the impacts of these various animals on the region’s agricultural production suggest that despite the Ministry of Agriculture’s efforts and those of the journal, the actions taken were not sufficient to maintain the crop levels necessary to satisfy the

\textsuperscript{859}“Mukafaha al-Jarad fi al-Jaza’ir,” \textit{al-Zira‘a al-Haditha} 4:9/10 (November/December 1929): 519-520. For the record, the people and supplies mobilized were “60000 workers, 4000 soldiers, 200000 zinc plates, 2658 pieces of cloth, 1696 mechanical sprayers, 764 flame bellows, 65 flamethrowers, 494 air bottles, 549 barrels, 951 hoes, 1011 shovels, 353 normal sprayers, 73 and 538 gloves, and 252 masks” as well as “300380 liters of Kerzil (?), 21337 kilograms of heavy oil, and 190000 grams of molasses(?) and 78680 kilograms of arseniate soda.”
fixed tax, making it extremely burdensome while the government provided little in the way of more coordinated support.\textsuperscript{860}

In the late 1920s discontent with the mandate’s handing of agricultural matters, especially given recent environmental conditions, continued to increase. A February 1928 report from the Aleppo Chamber of Agriculture made a special point of complaining to Ponsot, the current High Commissioner, about the operations of the recently reopened Agricultural Bank. It noted the failure of the Bank to fulfill its purpose, especially given the previous four years of particularly bad harvests due to \textit{souné}, locusts, and uncooperative weather. The bank, the chamber complained, was undercapitalized and used “the most extreme rigor in recovering its debts.”\textsuperscript{861} It had made the “economic error” of simultaneously putting up for a sale a large number of villages leading to depreciation in agricultural land values. Farmers, they continued, should not be treated as bankers or merchants since harvest yields, which fluctuated greatly from year to year, determined their ability to pay. The fact that cultivators still used the bank despite its “draconian conditions”—11% interest rate, short terms for repayment, and the risk of losing their property—indicated the “profound poverty of rural communities and the indescribable financial need.”\textsuperscript{862} Contrasting the situation with France where loans, they claimed, were granted for longer terms and easily renewable, they urged the mandate government to increase the bank’s capital and reduce its rates to no more than 9% and halt the selling of property.\textsuperscript{863}

\textsuperscript{861} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, “Mémoire de la Chambre d’Agriculture d’Alep sur la situation agricole,” February 1928.
\textsuperscript{862} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, “Mémoire de la Chambre d’Agriculture d’Alep sur la situation agricole,” February 1928.
\textsuperscript{863} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, “Mémoire de la Chambre d’Agriculture d’Alep sur la situation agricole,” February 1928.
Some of their other requests also suggested an ongoing tension over the value of local knowledge in dealing with agricultural issues versus knowledge acquired through “education.” They urged the High Commissioner to more effectively combat pests with experienced people. More long term, they requested that the government allow for the establishment of Agricultural Chambers in each kaza, adding in particular that they should be “composed of farmers, not very educated, it is true, but having experience” as that would be “much more effective than guidance emanating from young people for whom experience is almost totally absent”!864 The report also suggested a growing frustration with Aleppo’s more marginalized place under mandate administration as it requested the implementation of the vilayet law to prevent Damascus from having undue influence over Aleppo’s interests.865 Their demands reflected not only a frustration with the lack of government support for agriculture and, in particular, its failure to appreciate the local environment’s impact on harvest yields and the knowledge born of experience that they considered most qualified to cope with these challenges.

The more “equitable” tax system instituted under the mandate also began to creak under the weight of its inability to respond with agility to these local fluctuations in production. In 1929, *Al-Zira‘a al-Haditha* cited Achard’s observation that agricultural taxes accounted for more than 50% of the budget, and then queried whether did it not then deserve at least 50% of the government’s care?866 To demonstrate the weight of existing taxes on the cultivator, especially those in rainfed areas where production varied greatly from year to year, al-Ahdab compiled a chart specifying the expenses involved in farming 500 dönüms, the returns expected, and the

864 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, “Mémoire de la Chambre d’Agriculture d’Alep sur la situation agricole,” February 1928. It is unclear who exactly is meant by the inexperienced young people.
Based on his calculations, this left the farmer with 4 gold gurush per person per day. How, he demanded, was the farmer supposed to feed himself off such a paltry sum? Until recently in France, he noted, farmers had paid less tax than in Syria and yet agriculture there had reached a greater “degree of development”! The exorbitant rate of these taxes seems in part to have resulted from the pegging of the Syrian pound to the French franc. When the franc fell in 1927, the government increased the *terbih* by 97%, although, according to one estimate, given the relative fall of the Syrian pound it should have been only 25%.

In response to complaints such as these the government insisted it could not lower the *terbih*, but it would offer an estimation of the *a'shar* or tithe to village owners who requested it. If the estimation yielded an amount that was less than the *terbih* by 25% then the tax could be collected according to the estimation amount, but the request for estimation had to be made in April and had to pertain to all crops in the village. The bad years continued. In July 1930, a group of farmers (*agriculteurs*) sent a telegram to Paris expressing their incapacity to pay the *dîme*, declaring that it was now levied at twice its original value.

In addition to tax relief, appeals continued for a more proactive approach to encouraging and supporting agriculture. For example, just collecting and killing locusts was a basic duty of the Ministry of Agriculture and had long been a common practice—nothing for the Ministry to rest its laurels on. Where, demanded *Les Echoes de Damas*, were initiatives from the Ministry to respond to farmers’ “just demands for tax relief” not to mention plans for irrigation, protection

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873 MAE, Syrie-Liban 566, Telegram from Aleppo, July 18, 1930, 12.
against foreign competition, statistics collection, and recording of atmospheric conditions? Even the battle against the locusts had been carried out by peasants and at their expense while the Ministry “rested.”

Les Echoes blamed Achard, the French Counselor of Agriculture, and the Director of the Service, insisting al-Kaylani, the Minister of Agriculture and a champion of the “scientific” agriculture advocates, had very little say in the matter.

During the spring and summer of 1932 as elections brought a number of moderate National Bloc candidates to power in Syria--with the nationalist leader Jamil Mardam Bey eventually being given the cabinet posts of Finance and Agriculture--the region faced a mounting agricultural crisis. One of the earliest petitions addressed to the High Commission arrived in May from Hama, a province with large areas of rainfed lands cultivated through dry farming. Complaining of drought and insect damage, the petitioners explained that they had hoped to receive a reduction like Lebanon where the rate of the terbih had been reduced by 30%, instead they had only found themselves saddled with an increased tithe amount. Appealing to the conclusions of expert “scientific reports,” Al-Zira’a al-Haditha declared 1932 the worst agricultural season in decades and criticized the government for not reducing the a’shar, but only announcing a decision for estimation that was likely to incur expenses beyond the farmer’s capacity.

The journal again stressed a solution that would place the onus on the government to relieve farmers of additional costs. It insisted that “in the agriculture and finance offices there are a number of employees who can verify with trips to villages the condition of the season” and that

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875 “Dans le Ministère de l’Agriculture et l’Économie on ne fait rien,” Les Echoes de Damas, 28 August 1930; the minister at the time was presumably Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani, who according to Khoury was “the only committed nationalist to join the [Taj al-Din’s] government” in February 1928 (Khoury, Syria, 329).
876 Khoury, Syria, 374, 379.
the government should bear the costs of estimation if a farmer was justified in his loss. The finance ministry meanwhile issued a decision allowing for a reduction if estimators found the damage to be 25% or more. By 1932, the crisis forced the government to reduce the dime on cereals by 65% in Lebanon, 45% in the Alaouite state, and 33.33% in Syria and Alexandretta. But more sustained measures to respond to the crisis were not forthcoming. Not only were French officials loath to grant any concessions that might further reduce the budget, according to Khoury, the National Bloc lacked a program for “economic development, which they perceived to be inimical to their own interests.” This inaction in the face of an increasingly desperate situation for those who supposedly contributed 50% to the government’s budget fueled critique.

Alarmed by the growing agricultural crisis al-Zira’a al-Haditha sent out a call for responses to the situation from local agricultural experts (ahl al-khibra wa al-ma’rifa). It published three responses from Tawfiq al-Ahdab, now the general agricultural inspector for the northern area, Mustafa al-Shihabi, the Director of State Lands, and ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani, the former commerce and agriculture minister. Each of the responses identified the deterioration in agriculture as starting with the onset of the mandate and emphasized the need for a strong government response to assist cultivators by making more capital available, easing the burden of taxation, and implementing measures to shield local production from global competition.

Al-Ahdab was quite explicit in pinpointing the genesis of the crisis at the beginning of the mandate, noting that ten years prior to the current situation farmers would have been able to

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880 MAE, Syrie-Liban 549, High Commissioner to the President of the Counsel, February 19, 1932, p. 26-27.
881 Khoury, Syria, 264.
883 “al-Azma al-Zira’iya fi Suriya” al-Zira’a al-Haditha 5:9/10 (August/September 1932): 592. The journal especially commended the latter’s solidarity for preventing the French representative Bruère from closing the Selemiye agricultural school. A stance for which the journal was especially appreciative given that the first national constitutional government had decided to turn the school into a practical agricultural center—a move the journal condemned as a “huge scientific mistake” (592).
easily borrow to ensure a fruitful harvest, which they could sell at a good price and thereby repay their debts whether in installments or at once. In his opinion, the deterioration of agriculture in Syria could be divided into three periods: from 1920-26 he claimed farmers had lost what they had earned during the war, from 1926-1929, they lost to various misfortunes what they had before the war, and then in 1930 even the “strongest farmers” mortgaged what remained of their wealth, hoping for a good season and were disappointed. Given the pitiful harvests, large farmers were only able to pay off their small loans, while the interest continued to accumulate on their large ones. Small and middling farmers, on the other hand, had been accumulating debt since 1926 and could not even pay the interest, losing the entirety of their wealth. He underscored that the government had many responsibilities towards suffering farmers. In general it needed to assuage their burden from various taxes, but more specifically it should offer free seeds and fodder to those whose crops had been destroyed by drought and offer them basic sustenance to get them through the 1933 season.

Al-Shihabi brought the international repercussions of World War I for the region more clearly into focus. Citing statistics from the International Institute of Agriculture, he noted that the war had encouraged the expansion of cultivated areas in countries like Argentina, Australia, Canada, and the United States leading to overproduction and stockpiling that post-war had driven down seed prices. In order to help farmers cope with these shifting prices and environmental vagaries such as rainfall, it was the government’s responsibility to ensure enough agricultural capital was available in order to make it possible for peasants to dispense with moneylenders, to make the a’shar a just tax, to postpone the collection of back taxes, and to establish an

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agricultural politics that would use customs to protect local production in addition to finding more foreign markets for local products. He cited French policies in the metropole as exemplary in this last regard, noting that it increased customs when the French harvest was good and reduced them when it was lacking. Syria he insisted should do the same.  

Al-Kaylani emphasized not only the decrease in prices and the egregious increase in taxes at the hands of the government over a ten year span, but lamented the impact of pests like field mice and souné on the harvest. Al-Kaylani was much more blunt about the wastefulness of government spending for supposedly agriculture-related projects, but which turned out to be in support of other interests. Increasing irrigation, for example, was a priority so the government had spent a lot of money on implements and had hired a number of technical employees under a French director. Despite these measures, al-Kaylani insisted the country had not seen even partial benefits from their work. All they had done was dig a few wells in the Syrian badiya (desert) for the benefit of oil companies. He summed up this issue and hundreds of others like it as follows: “the government sucked for itself the blood of the people not to mention its money and led them to the abyss of bankruptcy.” It was the duty of the new constitutional government to ameliorate the corruption of the past ten years by focusing resources on the country’s immediate needs. With regards to agriculture in particular, he suggested, this would involve the government buying new tools “to distribute to farmers in installments of five to ten years.”

Each of these “agricultural experts” clearly saw a central role for the government in subsidizing and encouraging agriculture and criticized policies that treated it primarily as a

889 Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani, “al-Azma al-Zira’iya fi Suriya” al-Zira’a al-Haditha 5:9 (August/September 1932): 592-3. This perhaps reflects his connection to Hama, situated in an agricultural region that had been hard hit by the souné in particular.
revenue-generating cash cow. But the hoped-for amelioration in government policies proved just as vain as the hoped-for improvement in environmental conditions. By late November, farmers had planted the seeds they had but, presumably due to previous deficient harvests, without government assistance large areas would remain unplanted as farmers found themselves hard-pressed to obtain additional seeds or money for seeds from local merchants.892 Earlier in the fall, Muhammad Ali Bey al-‘Abid, the Syrian President, and Jamil Mardam Bey had wrangled with the Bank of Syria and Greater Lebanon to secure a loan that would enable the government to provide seeds to farmers in the coming season.893 Eventually one was granted, at a lower amount than they had initially requested, on the condition that the mandate authorities served as del credere agents.894 But even to the extent that farmers were able to sow their fields, without rain the seeds would not germinate—as the beginning of the new year came and went the much-anticipated rain did not arrive. Reports came in of people dying of hunger in Aleppo while others were leaving their villages for Beirut and Tripoli; in Jebel al-Druze, Latakia, and Lebanon seeds lay in fields waiting for rain to germinate. In Latakia and the Hawran birds ate the recently-sown seeds that had not been sufficiently buried.895

893 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syrie La Sécheresse et la Situation Agricole,” Delegate General of the High Commission to the President of the Council, MAE, 1 September 1932 ; High Commissioner to the President of the Council, MAE, 18 November 1932. The government had originally wanted 15 million francs, but when the bank’s director asked the High Commission for its opinion, he was told the requested amount was too high, half was sufficient and that it should be disbursed through an institution like the agricultural bank. On November 7th the Syrian government debated a loan of 10 million francs that would be granted at 5% interest in a discussion that the High Commissioner declared interesting as large landowners were complaining about how they were ruining themselves in order to help their farmers and speaking in “eloquent” defense of small cultivators.
As farmers anxiously watched the sky, accusations flew in the press about the lateness and paucity of government assistance. The council of ministers unanimously adopted a reform plan drawn up by the Director of Economic Services, Yusuf Atallah, which was then defeated by a vote of nine to three in the Parliament’s agricultural commission, which used budgetary reasons as a pretext. The press jumped on the vote, attributing it the “instigation of a foreign government officer”—a not-too-subtle reference to M. Achard—and took the commission to task for voting against it in order to save a mere 50,000 Syrian pounds while the region’s agriculture, its primary source of wealth, suffered. The government finally drew up a plan for aid distribution in early January but farmers complained of too little too late. In some cases the aid amounted to 25, 40, or 50 piasters per person—insufficient funds they claimed to feed one family a meal. According to Les Echoes, in one instance, an entire village was allotted only 179 piasters. Some farmers did not even receive enough to cover their transportation costs to the center of the kaza—presumably where many of them had to go to receive the promised aid. In the region of Djerablous near Aleppo where 104 villages out of 430 had been deserted, both villagers and pastoralists rejected the government’s allotment of 10,000 Syrian pounds as insufficient.

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897 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syrie La Sécheresse et la Situation Agricole,” “Extrait de la revue de la presse arabe de Damas—la réforme agricole,” 1, 2, 3 January 1933.
899 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syrie La Sécheresse et la Situation Agricole,” “Extrait de la revue de la presse arabe de Damas—les prêts aux cultivateurs,” 1, 2, 3 January 1933; “L’emprunt...agricole,” Les Echoes de Damas, 13 January 1933.
900 “L’emprunt...agricole,” Les Echoes de Damas, 13 January 1933.
901 “L’emprunt...agricole,” Les Echoes de Damas, 13 January 1933.
The direness of the situation prompted a critique of budgetary priorities. In the nationalist newspaper *al-Qabas* “graduates of the agricultural schools” urged the government to undertake the project outlined by Atallah. They explained that if the government needed to cut the budget it could do so by “eliminating the supplementary credits to ministers and firing the government employees who do nothing but read the newspapers and take their salaries at the end of each month.”

Insisting that the country needed an “agricultural politics,” they demanded how the government could continue to heavily tax the farmer without doing anything to help him improve and modernize his methods or protect him from the competition of foreign products, which themselves benefited from modern methods. *Al-Qabas* also critiqued the divided treasuries of the various states asserting that if the country had one united treasury it would have a reserve to deal with such a desperate situation. It pointed to the pre-war Ottoman era as an example of responsible fiscal administration, insisting the region of three million inhabitants “had been administered before the war in such a way that its expenses did not exceed those necessary for two Ottoman provinces.”

On the midst of this crisis, in April 1933, National Bloc leaders Jamil Mardam Bey and Mazhar Raslan resigned and Taj al-Din, who was more acquiescent to French demands, returned in 1934 to lead the government alongside the relatively new High Commissioner Martel.

Under this government, the mandate administration’s intransigence on responding more robustly

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903 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 862, “État de Syrie La Sécheresse et la Situation Agricole,” “Revue de la Presse arabe de Damas—la situation agricole,” 28 December 1932 and “La Nécessité d’une Politique Agricole,” *Les Echoes de Damas*, 30 December 1932. *Les Echoes* explained that the “union of agriculture school graduates” was a group of about 200 young people who had graduated from French and foreign agricultural schools as well as the Selemiye agricultural school. They planned to stay “on the margins of politics” and “to encourage agriculture in Syria and agricultural education, notably in initiating cultivators in modern methods, in defending their rights and in helping them.” Although given the above statement published in *al-Qabas* it appears that they weren’t willing to stay completely out of politics!


to the detrimental influences of environmental and political conditions on farmers and their agricultural productivity seems to have worsened. During the summer of 1933, 15,000 peasants fled their villages for Aleppo and 300 villages to the east of the city were reported to be deserted.907

In May 1934, farmers from Aleppo once again petitioned the government, claiming that they had anticipated a better 1933-34 agricultural season but lack of rains during a crucial period in April and March meant results were worse than expected, only compounding the struggles of previous years. Thus they requested a decrease to 3% in the agricultural bank’s interest rate and, starting in 1935, an increase to 30 years the time allowed to repay debts of more than 500 pounds. They also demanded the reduction of back taxes from 1928-32, waiting until 1935 to recover amounts loaned to “reliable farmers” for seeds, a halt to debt collection, and the implementation of measures to protect the harvest from foreign competition.908 The High Commissioner’s delegate rejected their claims of a bad harvest and denied their requests on all points, dismissing it as essentially the opposition’s “‘economic’ program.” He insisted that to decrease tax arrears was “nothing less than to compensate a weak taxpayer,” that any favors shown by the agricultural bank should go to small property owners (although it is unclear to what extent this bank would even lend to them), that seed advances should proceed, that there was no need for a debt moratorium, and that “all useful steps” had been taken to protect wheat and flour from foreign competition.909

Despite new High Commissioner Martel’s supposed preoccupation with improving the economic well-being of the mandated territories in the wake of the great depression, farmers

907 Sarrage, La Nécessité, 126.
908 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête des agriculteurs syriens,” Aleppo farmers to High Commissioner, 17 May 1934. The letter was signed by over 100 signatures, including some seals.
continued to consider their grievances ignored.\textsuperscript{910} The nationalist \textit{al-Qabas} used the government’s intransigence to call into question its legitimacy. It mocked in “bitter terms” the “prosperity” that mandate governance claimed to be bringing to the region, noting that a tax collector who had witnessed one of the north’s biggest farmers’ incapacity to pay suggested that only the 1934 tax be collected, while the director of finance and the \textit{mudir mal} insisted on collecting 1933 back taxes as well. Criticizing such tax collection processes as “the most prodigious and the most modern way to pressure the people and to condemn to death the economic life in general and agriculture in particular,” it insisted such a government was “unworthy to remain in power.” It also speculated as to whether a cabinet minister who was himself a large landowner had paid his back taxes or whether he had received special treatment.\textsuperscript{911} Even some French officials on the ground in the worst affected areas warned that the complete collapse of Syria’s agricultural infrastructure would have even more serious repercussions for the mandate budget than a failure to fully collect current taxes, but officials at the top begrudged any concessions.\textsuperscript{912}

Meanwhile, intelligence services followed various nationalist activists who seized upon the widespread discontent to hold several Agricultural Congresses and organize a Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Farmers. These organizations allowed landowning elites who had a vested interest not only in the fate of agricultural taxes, but also in mitigating peasant flight and holding onto their land, to position themselves as champions of and intermediaries for


\textsuperscript{911} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Liban” “Questions Locales,” 2 October 1934.

\textsuperscript{912} For the opinion of an official on the ground, see that of Lieutenant de Visme, officer of the Special Services and head of the post in Hama. He suggested that a commission visit villages and determine what portion of the \(\frac{1}{4}\) given to landowners by the \textit{fellah} was necessary for their subsistence. The rest could then be consigned to someone solvent before being sold, therefore preventing sales at a debased price. CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Perception des impôts,” July 3, 1934.
“oppressed” peasants and cultivators. In the fall of 1934 in Damascus, a “Congress” of elite farmers from diverse regions and politics—members of the National Bloc, the League of National Action, and the Nationalist Youth all were present—held a series of meetings to discuss what measures could be taken. Among their suggestions were “‘civil disobedience’” and “a state loan intended for farmers.” Abd al-Razzaq al-Dandashi of the League of National Action suggested that farmers should just refuse to pay taxes. Following the meeting, Ahmed al-Hasibi, Fakhri al-Baroudi, and representatives from Damascus, Aleppo, and Antioche set off for Beirut to meet with the High Commissioner and discuss matters. The High Commissioner, however, informed members of the Agricultural Congress that he considered their request to suspend tax collection for even a few months “revolutionary”—complaints had to be dealt with on a case by case basis—and “after a long and tiresome discussion” could only promise that he would ask delegates to exercise moderation in the realization of Agricultural Bank debts and the collection of back taxes.

The government’s plan to reinstate the 1925 terbih in 1935 and its insistence on collecting back taxes further fueled discontent. The fact that the market prices from 1924 on which the terbih was based had dropped by as much as 50% by 1932 meant farmers were now paying more than 50% of their harvests as tax. In northern Syria where conditions seem to have been particularly bad, the Committee for the Defense of the Rights of Farmers threatened that if the government did not postpone tax collection and help farmers with planting, they

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913 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” Telegram sent from Aleppo on October 25, 1934, and signed Sadek Rifai.
918 Sarrage, La Nécessité, 128.
“would refuse the payment of taxes and invite the authority to seize their lands.” At a later meeting, they proposed eliminating the tithe and instituting a tax on revenue. In March 1935, the Agricultural Congress of northern Syria attempted to turn up the heat on the mandate authorities by sending a petition to the Permanent Mandates Commission and Paris, with copies going to foreign representatives as well. Demanding justice and emphasizing the “precise figures” of data “demonstrating agricultural taxes exceed half of gross revenue leading to [farmers’] general ruin” they alleged in telegram-speak that “persistence this attitude demonstrates evident goal to ruin agriculture only resource of country.”

While elite nationalists positioned themselves to intervene with officials on both the local and international levels, protests from villagers erupted throughout the region and petitions poured into the office of the mandate’s High Commission. Village leaders explained the dire straits in which villagers throughout the region found themselves. They cited all manner of extreme natural conditions including droughts, souné, a “plague from the skies,” and, in one instance, flood. Some simply wrote that they could not pay the sums demanded, offering instead to pay something more in proportion with current harvests and market prices.

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921 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête des agriculteurs syriens,” Source Surete Alep Information No. 3835, 15 November 1934. This suggestion followed Martel’s November 2 suspension of Parliament (Khoury, Syria, 443).
922 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête des agriculteurs syriens,” Telegram to the High Commission signed by Rashid Rustum (secretary) and Ahmed al-Mudarris (president), 3 March 1935. Rustum was a key leader among students in Aleppo and al-Mudarris was a big landowner (Khoury, Syria, 272, 574; Faris, Min Howa, 406); Source Sûreté Alep Information No. 3635, 29 October 1934.
925 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs de la région d’Alep,” September 1, 1935, “Tal al Akhdar,” and “Kafr Chouwaya”; CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 868, “El Hermel.” In particular the residents of El Hermel stated that they could not pay the “Tarbi,” which was based on years of good harvests and high prices.
crisis persisted and deepened as officials continued to demand the payment of taxes in full, including arrears. Tax collectors went to local villages accompanied by riot police and gendarmes in the Aleppo region and “sizeable military escorts” were placed at their disposal in the Euphrates and Jazirah regions. Agents illegally confiscated land, livestock and harvests and put them up for auction. The Maronite archbishop of Damascus described “numerous” tax collectors seizing “plowing implements, products of the harvest, cattle, kitchen utensils, and even…a goat, a sewing machine, etc.” Petition writers threatened to abandon their lands. An official in southern Lebanon attributed peasant flight primarily to the burden of taxes, noting that the exodus from countryside to town had increased “in a disturbing way since our arrival in the country.”

Petitions to the High Commissioner from Lebanon also pointed out the injustice in insisting on excessive tax collection while not attending to basic infrastructure. A complaint from Tyre requested the cancellation of the “impôt unifié” which had combined the dîmes and land tax and a cancellation of back taxes or at least the permission to pay them in ten annual installments. They also requested that the government “open an agricultural bank like that

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926 See CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Perception des impôts,” Deputy delegate of the High Commission for Aleppo to the High Commissioner, August 29, 1934. In the report, he notes that insistence on collecting the back taxes from 1928-1933 have provoked the greatest outcry (2).
927 See for example CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Perception des impôts,” deputy delegate of High Commission for Aleppo to the High Commissioner, August 18, 1934, and Colonel Jacquot, deputy delegate of the High Commission for the Territories of the Euphrate, to the High Commissioner, August 10, 1934.
928 This description of French taxation methods is taken from Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 125-26. See also “Taqdi ‘ala mawsim al-fallah al-khasib,” al-Qabas, June 25, 1935, in which the author expresses shock and dismay at how officials went into a village and illegally confiscated the fellah’s animals and basic tools. See also CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête de Mgr Jean el Hage archevêque de Damas,” December 1934; “Kaf Chouwaya;” “Requête d’un group d’habitants d’Idlib;” and “Plainte des cultivateurs du sandjak d’Alexandrette.”
930 See also CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Zebdani;” “Kafr Chouwaya;” “Requête d’un group d’habitants d’Idlib ;” and “Plainte des cultivateurs du sandjak d’Alexandrette.”
932 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Desiderata exprimés par les habitants du Caza de Tyr,” 2 July 1934. They were also apparently paying an increased land tax that had been imposed during the war—the maintenance of which they deemed inequitable.
under the Ottomans,” provide funds for irrigation projects, which they noted had been in the
budget of the previous regime (presumably the Ottomans), build roads, and clean up swamps.933
Another petition from the village of Sir al-Duniya in northern Lebanon insisted the inhabitants
did not even know they were government subjects until the tax collectors showed up and “sold
the jewelry of the widow and orphan to collect taxes that are spent in other happy regions.”934
While French officials had vilified Ottoman methods of tax collection as oppressive and
unjust in contrast to their own system, local descriptions rejected such a characterization. Other
petitions decried the injustice of the mandate tax system and the heavy hand of the French
authorities and their agents who were accompanied by “soldiers of the militia to whom they give
full liberty to seize beasts of burden, seeds, and provisions, using the most extreme harshness.”935
In Homs, even three notables who had not paid their taxes found their homes broken into so the
Financial Services could seize their furniture.936 Contrary to French official discourse that
insisted on the modernity and fairness of their system, local critiques condemned mandate tax
collection as “employing methods of the Middle Ages and contrary to justice.”937 French
officials dismissed such complaints, claiming they were exaggerated and that “without a doubt
the remarks and gestures of these rather unsophisticated people [i.e. the soldiers] lack finesse and
nuance, but they correspond on the whole with the mentality (mentalité) of the Syrian
peasant.”938 Deflecting criticism of mandate taxation methods necessitated the production of a
discourse that depicted peasants as rude and accustomed to such treatment as longue durée
victims of violence.

934 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête des habitants de Sir a/s des impôts,” 13 September 1934.
935 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” telegram signed by a number of Aleppan
“personalities,” December 25, 1933.
937 Ibid.
938 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Perception des impôts,” deputy delegate in Aleppo to the High Commissioner,
August 18, 1934.
Yet such derogatory allusions to Ottoman practice did not correspond to peasants’ and landowners’ accounts. In fact, a number of petitions and requests asked for a return to the system as it had been under the Ottomans with the tax assessment based on the given year’s harvest. In 1932, at the height of the drought, 50 percent of villages demanded an open-air estimation of their crops. Tax collection by expensive outside tax collectors also served as a source of discontent. The Maronite archbishop of Damascus suggested a return to tax collection by local village leaders (mukhtars) who “living locally, know the inhabitants and can collect the taxes at an opportune time; whereas the tax collectors, strangers to the region, do not make but short and rare appearances…. Furthermore the method of collecting taxes by the mukhtars would economize nine-tenths of the budget of the tax collectors.” In Hama, a region identified by mandate officials as one with particularly recalcitrant debtors, a letter signed by almost 250 signatories, insisted that Ottoman policies were fair and rational in comparison to mandate methods:

We were hoping that our condition during the time of the mandate of the esteemed French government would be closer to justice and logic than during the Turkish government, rather the reality of the situation is we see our condition in a wreck. Instead of continual progress [we] confront unceasing decline. Now we pay three times as much as we paid during the time of the Turkish government in taxes despite the greater support of circumstances for agriculture at that time from the present considering the proportionality of the expenses of production and its value and the lack of encountering pests like those which have stricken the farmer for ten years until now from souné, lack of water, and others. The tithe [dariba al-`ushriya] and the property tax [dariba al-amlakiya] on land even though they existed during the time of the Turkish government they were nominal more than real and what was levied on the taxpayers [was] in a

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939 See for example CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 831, “Reclamion des habitants,” Villagers to the High Commissioner, 9 August 1930 in which the villagers insisted the claims they had achieved under the Ottomans as a result of their labor and cultivation were no longer respected and “their legal rights…stamped upon” under the mandate government’s “inexplicable despotism.”
940 See for example CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 976, “Requête des habitants du village de Mecheirefet Samouk (Lattaquié) a/s des impôts,” 20 October 1933.
941 Sarrage, La Nécessité d’une réforme, 128.
942 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 867, “Requête de Mgr Jean,” 2-3. French officials noted in the margins this “curious apology of mukhtars” (1). The high salaries commanded by government employees, including tax collectors, repeatedly come up as a major grievance.
manner realistic to circumstances, and that which was levied was taken with justice, i.e. the a’shar was taken in kind ['aynan] or by its actual, true price. In current conditions it is taken with a price greater than its actual price by a lot.\textsuperscript{943}

Adopting the discourse of progress, the authors expressed their appreciation for the concept and then proceeded to argue point by point how Ottoman policies were actually more just and logical than those of the mandate.\textsuperscript{944} They also insisted on the illegality of collection methods, which “seek to recover [agricultural taxes] without observance of the law that exempts seeds and provisions.”\textsuperscript{945} The High Commission’s delegate to the Syrian Republic dismissed their claims, writing Martel that both he and the Minister of Finance agreed that it was necessary “to react vigorously in this sanjak against fiscal laziness,” noting that a response to the issues they raised such as the possibility of a new estimation based on current prices was under study by the Ministry for 1936.\textsuperscript{946}

During the summer of 1935, the plight of cultivators became front page news in the nationalist press as well. Articles in the National Bloc newspaper al-Qabas recounted harrowing tales of farmers forbidden from extracting their grain until they paid all of their back taxes. Officials were sent to villages to prevent the harvest from being moved to threshing floors and other officials searched suqs and requisitioned crops “as if [they were] drugs or weapons.”\textsuperscript{947} Farmers resisted, contending that paying all of the demanded taxes would take their entire crop if not more and leave them with nothing to eat or to sow. In Homs, a group of farmers demanded

\textsuperscript{943} CADN/Syrîe-Liban/1, 867, “Perception des impôts,” deputy delegate to Hama and Homs to Comte Martel, August 8, 1934 and “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” Letter from Hama cultivators, July 9, 1935. Translated from the original in Arabic. 'Aynan can also mean “by the eye.”
\textsuperscript{944} CADN/Syrîe-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” Letter from Hama cultivators.
\textsuperscript{945} CADN/Syrîe-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” letter from Hama cultivators. Interestingly in the French translation of this sentence in their petition it refers to “the abstraction made of agricultural taxes.”
\textsuperscript{946} CADN/Syrîe-Liban/1, 867, “Requête d’agriculteurs syriens,” Delegate of the High Commission to Martel, 25 October 1935. The Financial Minster at this point was Henri Hindiya, identified by Khoury as a “moderate or pro-French” bureaucrat (Khoury, Syria, 260).
that the tithe be reduced at least by half or they would leave their “crops to fate.” One reporter described a scene he witnessed in which a group of farmers begged the local financial official “to permit them to take out what will barely keep them and their families alive” as they didn’t even have food for one day, but the official was uncompromising in his refusal. Another writer in *al-Qabas*, identifying as a *fellah* from Homs scorned the government offer to lower the tithe by only 30 percent and described the impossible nature of the situation in which the ban on removing the crops from storehouses left them at the mercy of weather and rats. He summed up the uncompromising position of the government thus: “the one who milks milks to the extent that he fed his animal and this does not appeal to our government because it does not give anything yet wants to milk in a manner that God has not permitted.” Instead of demanding far more than it gave, he suggests the government could learn from the farmer who must balance between feeding and milking his animal. Given the government’s current policies, taxation ranked alongside the pests of agriculture, such as the *souné* and field mice.

Discursively, French officials had emphasized the justice and equality of these taxation policies; the practice of mandate tax collection presented a stark contrast. Officials were intent on implementing a system, the *terbih* and eventually the cadastre, which was no longer based on actual harvest yields displayed on the threshing floor or current market prices, but instead a one-time calculated average estimate, which would then be replaced by the calculations of a cadastre-based land tax. In theory, local technocrats also supported this policy, noting in particular how it responded to the exigencies of scientific agriculture. In practice, under the mandate it seems to have been primarily aimed at ensuring a set amount to fund the budget each year. Thus its

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949 “Taqqi.”
950 “Saihat.”
collection tended more often than not to be largely arbitrary because it was imposed without regard for the limits wrought by the vagaries of nature and markets. The result of this theoretical, detached “fairness” was thus a system that left farmers increasingly indebted, desperate, and exposed.

The situation also gave certain nationalist leaders, many of whose own interests were closely tied to agricultural production, a chance to position themselves as defenders of the oppressed peasant. Citing the lack of any response to their demands, in the wake of this crisis, the Damascus, Homs, and Hama chambers of agriculture resigned and delegations of farmers from throughout Syria arranged a meeting in Damascus. They complained that the rate of taxation “had taken an actual form of dispossession driving the peasants to misery.” While they had requested a new estimation based on net revenues that would account for changes since the estimations done in the early 20s, their ultimate demand looked to Iraq and Turkey for precedent—a unified tax that would combine the tithe and the wergho. They also called on the government to protect local production from foreign competition and ensure the Agricultural Bank was not “a bank of exploitation, but of agricultural aid.” If the government persisted in its “negligence,” they threatened to leave their lands uncultivated.

When French officials made promises about looking into reforms for 1936, nationalists rejected any reform that did not come from Parliament and attacked French officials’ competence, questioning for instance the French Financial Counselor’s capacity “to pronounce upon the commercial, financial, and agricultural politic to adopt in the country.” In the summer of 1936, the government formed estimation commissions to reevaluate the dimes and while one report suggested this measure had lessened discontent, as the summer drew to a close

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other reports surfaced of resistance in some kazas.\textsuperscript{955} The suggestion was that villagers were under the impression that a new government more favorable to their interests would soon be in power—with the Syrian delegation currently in Paris for negotiations on a treaty (news of its initialing would reach Syria on September 10th) this did not seem so far-fetched.\textsuperscript{956} The fact that the summer of 1936 saw “some of the worst bankruptcies since the great world depression…aggravated by unusually poor harvests in the Hawran” suggested that in any event such measures were too little, too late.\textsuperscript{957}

Eventually French officials had to admit that the harvest “dominated” the finances of the government—“if the harvest is abundant, the tax is easily collected and the budget balances. Drought produces scarcity and the deficit; no savings, no bank resources to assure the wealth of the treasury.”\textsuperscript{958} Duraffourd meanwhile continued to churn out his annual cadastral progress reports, but in the absence of the cadastre’s completion and perhaps also in response to the contestation that taxation methods had provoked under the mandate, in 1938 he also produced an analysis that compared Ottoman and mandate taxation methods with the system French administrators had used in Tunisia and Morocco, the tertib.\textsuperscript{959} The tertib was a proportional tax assessed on the gross production of the harvest, but only at 5%.\textsuperscript{960} While acknowledging the concerns of Syrian landowners and peasants regarding the difficulties of assessing a fixed tax given the fluctuations in climatic conditions prevailing in the region, he also managed to suggest

\textsuperscript{955} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 868, “La Question des Impôts,” Arrêté No. 162, 8 August 1936 and Arrêté No. 163, 8 August 1936, “Note” from the High Commission’s delegate to Syria, 31 July 1936; Deputy Delegate for Aleppo to High Commission’s delegate to Syria, 31 August 1936.
\textsuperscript{956} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 868, “La Question des Impôts,” Deputy Delegate for Aleppo to High Commission’s delegate to Syria, 31 August 1936; Khoury, Syria, 468.
\textsuperscript{957} Khoury, Syria, 480.
\textsuperscript{958} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 868, “Situation politique et financière de la Syrie et au Liban,” 29 January 1937.
\textsuperscript{959} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 971, “Étude relative à la dîme et au Wirgho en vigueur en Syrie, et au Tertib en vigueur au Maroc et en Tunisie.”
\textsuperscript{960} CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 971, “Étude relative à la dîme et au Wirgho en vigueur en Syrie, et au Tertib en vigueur au Maroc et en Tunisie,” 20 October 1938, 19, 53-54. Duraffourd contrasts this with the impôt foncier in France which was assessed on net revenue and which he traced back to the influence of the Physiocrats (16-17).
that they were being stubborn out of habit, even irrational, underlining (literally) that “it is nearly impossible to make them understand that they benefit in the system of a set tax at a rate that is, in the majority of cases, less than that which would result from the strict application of the texts determining in the past the tithe.”

Syrian farmers, however, insisted that until there were reserves that would allow them to make up the difference in a year of deficient harvests, they preferred to pay a proportional tax.

After evaluating a number of options for assessing agricultural taxes, Duraffourd eventually concluded that while the tertib would actually be the best option for Syria, it required “a suitable organization and specialized personnel” which were not available. He thus suggested the fixed tax used in Palestine, which required classifying lands, but not evaluating them, and an impôt foncier derived from the value of land sales like that used by Switzerland and Turkey. Almost two decades after bleeding the country dry of its agricultural wealth, or as Syrian farmers often liked to put it, milking it beyond what it had been fed, mandate officials finally started to admit that maybe their approach to taxation had not been so rational after all.

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962 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 971, “Étude relative à la dîme et au Wirgho en vigueur en Syrie, et au Tertib en vigueur au Maroc et en Tunisie,” 12. It is interesting to recall in this discussion the origins of the 12.5% rate at which the tithe was assessed in the late Ottoman period and which for Duraffourd indicated its contrasting heaviness for farmers (13). The additional 2.5% was intended to raise money for schools and capital for the agricultural bank so theoretically was a means of providing to some extent those reserves that farmers insisted were necessary for implementing a fixed tax.
963 For an example of the calculations involved see CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 971, “Caza de Homs—Village de Gajar Emir,” October 25, 1938, p. 15. But even this tax would be heavier than the wirgho and dîmes together. The estimated tax for the village of Gajar Emir near Homs, for example, amounted to 72488 PS in comparison with a total tax from wirgho and dîmes (terbih) of 60316 PS. On the Palestine tax, see Bunton, Colonial Land, 150-155.
964 CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 971, “Étude relative à la dîme et au Wirgho en vigueur en Syrie, et au Tertib en vigueur au Maroc et en Tunisie,” 59. In Turkey, a consumption tax had also replaced the tithe in 1925.
Conclusion

In the April 6, 1937 issue of *al-Qabas*, an article lamented the decline of the condition of the *fellah* since the war, accusing “the responsible powers” of “contempt and negligence…until the *fellah* has become like the milk cow that benefits with her milk and good things her owner who neglects to care for her and isn’t interested in ensuring the continuity of her milk.”965 This evaluation of the state of Syria’s agricultural sector in the latter years of the mandate reflected the culmination of a variety of French mandate policies that had sought to reorient Syria’s economy in the postwar moment.

French commercial interests, aiming to consolidate their, and by extension France’s, economic strength vis-à-vis other strong or rising powers, considered Syria to be a source of wealth, raw materials and markets. Taxation policies, including the gradual mapping of a cadastre, were fundamental practices championed by mandate administrators in order to efficiently extract the region’s wealth. They also made peasants’ lands and produce increasingly legible to and exploitable by international, particularly French, capital, while exposing peasants to greater risk in the event of the inevitable environmental impacts on agricultural production. The result was an increasing “unevenness” both within different communities in Syria and between Syria and the global sphere. While local technocrats supported the essence of these reforms because of their perceived importance to encouraging “scientific” agricultural practice and more centralized government control, they also insisted that they had to be accompanied by policies of state support to mitigate the potential adverse impacts of this exposure.

By the mid-1930s, matters had reached a crucial juncture and rural communities expressed their desperation by abandoning their villages or threatening to do so if officials did not revise mandate policy. Mandate officials explained away this resistance and critique of “progress à l’européenne” by depicting peasants as eternally oppressed, resistant to change and inured to violence, not as having legitimate grievances.\textsuperscript{966} There was also no place in this explanation for acknowledging the proposals of local technocrats whose concerns for peasant welfare centered on agriculture’s essential role in their plan for the nation’s economic prosperity. As a result, their proposals stemmed from a concern for how the state could mediate rural communities’ exposure to international markets as well as mice. While interested in global debates about strategies that could facilitate and enable the implementation of new developments in agriculture, these technocrats also recognized a key role for state investment in financing and encouraging them. Under the mandate, however, with the region’s agricultural production at stake, landowning nationalist elites organized in defense of their interests around the issue of agrarian reform, arrogating to themselves the roles of mediator and defender of the oppressed peasant and cultivator. Elite critiques contradicted French discursive representations of “progress,” but in proposing their intermediary role these elites prioritized many similar concepts and technologies of rule, representing them as services to cultivating the wealth of the Syrian nation, whose government had the duty and responsibility to shield and protect from uneven global space that nation’s essence, the peasant.

\textsuperscript{966} See for example Weulersse, \textit{Paysans}. 
CONCLUSION

From April 19-26, 1942 a group of interested parties met in Beirut for the third Beirut “semaine sociale.” The topic under discussion for the week was “L’Agriculture Richesse Nationale.” A volume of presentations compiled as a record of the event presented a variety of opinions about the state of the region’s agriculture as different technocrats offered their proposals regarding how to pursue the future agricultural *mise en valeur* of Syria and Lebanon, underlining “the social and moral significance of these reforms.”

The themes were familiar: irrigation, education, markets, land tenure, credit, and the paradox of a rural to urban exodus alongside an enthusiasm for a “return to the land.” The existing deficiencies they identified stressed the impacts of mandate policies on local agricultural infrastructure, comparing it unfavorably with that of approaches which had been pursued in neighboring states.

In 1956 following the region’s independence from mandate rule, Mustafa al-Shihabi presented his own critique of agricultural administration under the mandate in a series of lectures he presented to the Institute of Advanced Arabic Studies. Entitled “Lectures in Colonialism [*Muhadarat fi al-Ist’mar*],” the speeches covered a wide range of topics related to both the history of colonialism and the recent experience of its impacts on Syria under the mandate. He devoted an especially critical section to the Ministry of Agriculture.

In summing up and critiquing the mandate’s legacy, these technocrats did not question the necessity of state intervention in the agricultural sphere. Rather they spoke of such intervention as an essential aspect of the “modern” and “rational” agricultural infrastructure and practice the region required for its agricultural development. In their opinion, despite French

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968 See “Table de Matières” of *L’Agriculture Richesse Nationale*.
officials’ claims to a rational and modern approach, such interventionist policies had not characterized mand河北 rule, which they at times explicitly contrasted with Ottoman rule. From the ongoing prevalence of large landownership to “lack of a master plan and perseverance” for disseminating “modern” technical methods to the nonexistence of agricultural schools, farm schools, research stations, and model fields, the government under the mandate had prioritized proposals over the practices and institutions local technocrats considered essential for modern agricultural infrastructure. Not even a “rational test of dry-farming” had been attempted. Al-Shihabi contrasted the agriculture politics of mandate rule even more explicitly and unfavorably with that which had come before. He complained of the government’s inability to combat pests, its failure to open depots for distributing useful agricultural implements as the Ottoman and Faysali governments had done, and its closure of the Selemiye school while opening the Bouka one for “political not agricultural” reasons. Al-Shihabi even suggested that the French Counselor of agriculture had maintained a rather cozy relationship with senior large landowners, spending much of his time offering them coffee and cigarettes when they came to visit him, while neglecting the practical work required of the government to support agriculture. In fact, the main evidence of the Counselor’s activities, according to Al-Shihabi, were copious “theoretical reports” from which “the agriculture of the country does not advance.” Progress, he suggested, was a product of applied practice and experimentation and coordinated government support.

970 Saadé, “Le Problème,” 22. The one area in which he did think substantial progress had been made was the work of the cadastre and the application of the impôt foncier it facilitated. Despite this, he was critical of its failure to tailor its application better to local conditions. In Lebanon, for instance, he noted that the current system needed modifying for fruit trees as it taxed the number of trees planted and was not based on the harvest and its vicissitudes (Saadé, “Le Problème,” 19-21).
972 al-Shihabi, Muhadarat, 168.
973 al-Shihabi, Muhadarat, 167-168. Certainly there are a number of quite lengthy ones authored by him in the archives. For a sample see CADN/Syrie-Liban/1, 1571, Agriculture 1927-1928, “Notes Achard.”
Looking abroad, countries such as Egypt, Palestine, and Cyprus represented examples Syria and Lebanon should emulate in building agricultural institutions, including agricultural cooperatives. In order to do so, Fouad Saadé, one of the contributors to the “semaine sociale” volume, appealed for greater state support for agriculture, asserting that “the regression of Syrian-Lebanese agriculture resided in its being abandoned to itself”—agriculture needed “under directive of the state, to discipline itself with a view to exploiting at best the cultures perfectly adapted to our climate and our soil.” He appealed for an agricultural politic that would be realized by “rational application.” From the cooperation between the state and elites that had characterized the pursuit of infrastructure in the late Ottoman period, the centrality of the state to implementing “modern” agriculture had emerged as a fully articulated concept. Mandate rule however had injected its particular politics into this trajectory, disrupting this process of infrastructure building and preferring to divide the region into statelets whose capacity to maintain or expand this infrastructure operated primarily according to the dictates of political expediency and relationships cultivated with certain cooperative elites.

The development of technocratic approaches to infrastructure designed to facilitate the implementation of new agricultural technologies and methods spanned the late Ottoman and French mandate periods in the eastern Mediterranean. By pursuing a study that includes both periods, I have demonstrated the practical and intellectual continuities in approaches to rural administration and agrarian reform that transcended the changes in political and imperial space following World War I. On the other hand, this change in imperial and political space heralded a significant divergence in the nature of the relationship between the state, technocratic elites, and infrastructural establishment. It also represented a shift in imperial priorities for the local

environment. Tracing this transition and its implications, I elucidate its impacts on technocratic networks, its consequences for both institution building and the environment, and the diverse articulations of “modernity,” “science,” and “expertise” that accompanied it.

Networks operating at the global, imperial, and local levels are a particularly productive, but underexplored, means of transcending this periodization. Tracing the participation of individual Ottoman, Syrian, and French actors through these networks and across the divide of World War I highlights their changing roles and capacities to maneuver in different imperial spaces, their ability to engage different “imperial repertoires,” and their changing roles as intermediaries. Motivated by a desire to increase revenues, the state during the final decades of the Ottoman Empire had funded and encouraged the growth of an imperial network of institutions, experts, and technocrats to experiment with, demonstrate, and assess the applicability of new technologies and methods to the empire’s environments. Often supported by local elites, these technocrats also began to forge new connections with rural farming communities as they went about their work.

The mandate state in contrast welcomed technocratic expertise insofar as it fit with mandate priorities that largely eschewed investment and emphasized extraction—priorities shaped by postwar metropole demands as well as a particular vision of the Syrian peasants’ place in a hierarchy of rural “progress.” Not only did French officials largely fail to acknowledge the implications of local participation in these global networks, but they regarded local administration and agricultural practice as something akin to that of ancien régime France. Thus they formulated policy based on this perception and did so in tandem with a very narrow conception of how the region’s environment would best serve metropole raw material needs. The

977 See Burbank and Cooper, Empires, 3-17.
978 See André Latron, La vie rurale en Syrie et au Liban: étude d’économie sociale (Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique, 1936), 242.
result was a mandate administration that tended to disregard local technocratic voices, leading to an increasing tension between them and the mandate state, in contrast with the relationship that had existed between them and the Ottoman state. The consequences of this tension and the impacts for emerging agriculture-related infrastructure that it implied were particularly significant because they developed at a moment when technocratic actors were insisting on more and more state intervention, investment, and support.

In tracing these connections, I incorporate a perspective that previous work on the late Ottoman and French mandate periods has not systematically analyzed—the relationship between agricultural practices and policies, technology, and the environment. By including an examination of the role played by environments and technologies in shaping institutional developments and local responses to them in the region, I demonstrate why certain forms of “scientific” technology and practice did not find more immediate, widespread acceptance. Far from outright rejection of new technologies, I suggest that local farmers and peasants were highly sensitive to the ecological fragility and idiosyncrasies of the lands they worked. They were thus interested in, but nonetheless skeptical of, untested and untried methods and tools.

In addition to the ecological risks, such technologies required the acceptance of obligations to new forms of infrastructure. Goodman at al. have argued that agricultural change differed from other forms of industrial development because it “confronts capitalism with a natural production process” meaning that it could not be transformed as a whole by capitalist development but rather that various “discrete elements” were industrialized. In the United States, Fitzgerald has argued that despite a piecemeal nature of developments, this process eventually produced the web of an “industrial system that was…constructed across the

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country.” As a result, adopting a new technology could entail taking on any number of new obligations and practices—the more elaborate the technology, the more potentially diverse these relationships. In the eastern Mediterranean, these obligations and practices could involve debts to the agricultural bank, new arrangements of property ownership, or the need for specialized knowledge to repair machines. Accepting these obligations or new forms of practice not only required reliable infrastructure, but also access to markets and market prices that would make additional investments worthwhile. Most farmers in Syria and Lebanon appear to have remained wary of the institutional support available to them given the historical changes that impacted the region during the first half of the twentieth century.

This emphasis on the concerns revolving around the intersection of environment and technology has enabled me to identify new connections developing between rural and urban actors and the responses of rural communities to these emerging connections. Bringing technocratic involvement into the picture complicates and builds on an existing literature dealing with existing urban-rural connections between landlords and peasants or merchants and cultivators. I elaborate on representations of rural communities as “suspicious” and “traditional” to suggest the ecological, technological, and infrastructural reasons behind rural reluctance to more enthusiastically respond to technocratic initiatives. Especially it seems during the mandate only farmers with significant personal finances felt secure enough to experiment and even then the results could often be ruinous. Given the precariousness of well-known ecologies and new infrastructures, most local farmers seem to have maintained the

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981 Fitzgerald, *Every Farm*, 5.
982 See for example, Khoury, *Syria*; Provence, *Revolt*.
983 Khoury, *Syria*, 64.
practices they knew best, allowing themselves only small investments in, for example, plows of local design but with more damage-resistance parts. Extending cultures, meanwhile, remained a delicate enterprise. Not only was it fraught with concerns about security as most of this expansion was occurring towards the east where it had the potential to infringe on pastoralists’ pastures, but it also brought with it even more heightened concerns about adequate rainfall. After all, land on the edge of many cultivated areas, especially to the east, was such that it was only productive with careful application of dry-farming methods and that only if enough rain fell. Understanding the intersection of these factors helps clarify the multifarious dynamics at work in the process of agricultural institution-building, the projects of officials involved in the networks working to facilitate its implementation, and the motivations behind local reactions.

At the same time that incorporation of environmental and technological elements clarifies evolving urban-rural connections and the responses of rural communities, analyzing the discursive terms that technocrats, bureaucrats, and other officials used to represent rural communities suggests how the deployment of concepts such as “modernity,” “science,” or “progress” served to bolster claims to certain distinctions. In particular, I have demonstrated how those who articulated them did so in ways that both reflected their own “imperial imaginaries” and were instrumental in positioning themselves with respect to the material and structural changes that were underway. In Egypt Gasper has argued that an emerging intelligentsia used “representations of the peasants” and “scientific idioms of agricultural knowledge” to position themselves vis-à-vis the peasantry, “legitimating and lending authority to the social ambitions and the political position of what became the nationalist elite.”985 In the discourse of the Ottoman Empire’s administrators and technocrats I have demonstrated that discussions of peasants,

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farmers, and “scientific” agriculture served to elevate the status of agriculture in order to make it as worthy of study and investment as industry. In particular, they aimed to encourage elites, especially those with their own land, to be more active in its practice—a position driven by this practice’s more capital-intensive nature. These representations relied on a concept of scientific practice distinguished as a form of expertise distinct from that of existing agricultural practice. However, the emphasis on the need for agricultural education, which in practice at least, seemed intended more for the elite, as well as the structure of model farms and fields was an implicit recognition of the importance of existing, local knowledge. Agricultural education provided a way for elites to stake their own claims to a distinct, scientifically sanctioned, technological prowess, while also implicitly acknowledging their own lack of expertise at what they increasingly considered a highly profitable enterprise.986

These representations worked to increase agriculture’s prestige and the agricultural institution building they accompanied sought to develop agricultural practice in ways that officials regarded as more remunerative for the state. The establishment of these institutions and the context of these discourses in the eastern Mediterranean, however, does not suggest that Ottoman administrators treated the inhabitants of these regions as an internal “other” or that their rule resembled a version of colonialism.987 Rather examining the local policies and discourses of Ottoman administrators in the context of empire-wide infrastructure building and Ottoman participation in global networks of expertise demonstrates that these institutions and discourses were part of a broader administrative policy to address the implementation of new agricultural

986 See Boudieu, Distinction.
technologies and methods in Ottoman ecologies. Constrained by finances, concern for environmental impacts, and frustrated at times by the responses of rural communities, certain officials sometimes referred to critics as being “less enlightened,” but they used these representations strategically and pointedly to refer to specific members of communities, not the populations of entire regions or provinces. In fact, many elites were sympathetic to these imperial projects.

This discussion and approach would change during the French mandate as elites enthusiastic for scientific agricultural practice would find their position vis-à-vis the state shift. Instead of a state that supported their aspirations and what they deemed a “rational,” “scientific” approach to agricultural policy defined by a government-directed plan and support, they confronted the mandate state. Its French counselors emphasized their technical expertise and their studies of potential projects for agricultural development, but they represented an imperial rule that was unwilling to make investments in more comprehensive local agricultural infrastructure. Rather they pursued policies aimed at the incorporation of the region into a French-dominated imperial sphere—the French imperial equivalent of what Goswami has termed Britain’s “scale-making project” in India. Through policies such as the linking of the Syrian pound to the French franc, the mapping of the cadastre, the encouragement of crops needed by the metropole, and attempts at more standardized taxation, they sought to facilitate the flow of French capital into the countryside and the extraction of its production. The impacts of the increasing “unevenness” that this created between the local and global spheres fell heavily on peasants already struggling with drought and increasing pests. In response, elites, especially

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988 See chapter 2 and Minawi, “Beyond Rhetoric” for a similar analysis related to administrative strategies in the Hijaz.
989 Goswami, Producing, 32.
990 Cooper, Colonialism, 91.
landowning ones, would position themselves as intermediaries between the peasants and the mandate state, especially in the heady days of 1930s nationalist mobilization, which happened to follow one of the worst periods of drought “in living memory.” In the mandate’s waning days and its aftermath critiques of this imperial legacy’s impact on the region would serve to underscore the importance of state action to ensure a “modern” and “rational” approach to agricultural development. Tracing these projects, their accompanying representations, and varying visions for environmental management from the Ottoman period through the mandate elucidates the longue durée trajectory of these policies and their constitution through diverse levels of interaction: global, imperial, and local.

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- **MF.MKT** Maarif Nezareti Mektubi Kalemi
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