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## Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East

The working people, who constitute the majority in any society, can be and deserve to be subjects of history. Joel Beinin's state-of-the-art survey of subaltern history in the Middle East demonstrates lucidly and compellingly how their lives, experiences, and culture can inform our historical understanding. Beginning in the middle of the eighteenth century, the book charts the history of peasants, urban artisans, and modern working classes across the lands of the Ottoman Empire and its Muslim-majority successor-states, including the Balkans, Turkey, the Arab Middle East, and North Africa. Inspired by the approach of the Indian Subaltern Studies school, the book is the first to present a synthetic critical assessment of the scholarly work on the social history of this region for the last twenty years. It offers new insights into the political, economic, and social life of ordinary men and women and their apprehension of their own experiences. Students will find it rich in narrative detail, and accessible and authoritative in presentation.

JOEL BEININ is Professor of Middle East History at Stanford University. His publications include *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (1998) and *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-65* (1990).

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Joel Beinin

*Stanford University*



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To the spirit of the Thälmann Battalion  
and the Abraham Lincoln Brigade,  
and those who carry it forward today

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As always, Miriam has supported me with her care and love.

## Glossary

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- ‘aliya* – wave of Zionist immigration to Palestine
- amir* or *hakim* – commander or prince, the hereditary ruler of Mount Lebanon
- ‘ammiyya* – commune, the name for peasant uprisings in nineteenth-century Mount Lebanon and Hawran
- aradi al-filaha* or *athar* – lands on which peasants had usufruct rights in Egypt
- aradi al-usya* – lands granted to the mamluks in Egypt
- ayan* (Tur.), *a‘yan* (Ar.), also called *derebeys*, *ağas*, or *mütegalibes* – provincial notables or warlords who enhanced their power at the expense of the central Ottoman state
- bilad al-sham* – greater Syria, including current-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel
- boyars* – local notables who became absentee landlords in Wallachia and Moldavia
- çift-hane* system – the normative agrarian land-tenure system of the Ottoman Empire. Each peasant household (*hane*) had the right to perpetual tenancy on a farm (*çift*) large enough to sustain the family on state-administered land as long as taxes were paid and cultivation maintained
- çiftlik* – a farm, sometimes, but not always, a large, market-oriented estate
- colon* – a European settler in Algeria
- dira* – the collectively held tribal domain in North Arabia and lower Iraq
- dunam/dunum* – Palestine: 1 dunam = 0.23 acres; Iraq: 1 dunum = 0.618 acres
- effendiyya* – primarily an Egyptian term, the urban middle strata educated in a western style and adopting European dress
- esnaf* (Tur.), *tawa‘if* (Ar.) – urban guilds of artisans, merchants, and service workers, rarely peasants
- faddan* – the standard Egyptian land measure, 1.03 acres
- farda* (Ar.), *ferde* (Tur.) – head tax imposed by the Egyptian regime during the occupation of greater Syria in the 1830s

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- gedik* – originally, the tools necessary for a craft; subsequently, the right to practice it
- Hatt-ı Şerif* – 1839 Gülhane Edict, marking the onset of the Tanzimat reforms
- Histadrut – the General Federation of Hebrew Workers in (the Land of) Israel established in 1920
- hospodars* – wealthy Greek merchants who ruled Wallachia and Moldavia indirectly for the Ottoman state
- ib‘adiyya* – a tax-free grant of uncultivated lands in mid-nineteenth century Egypt
- iltizam* or *muqata‘a* – tax farming or the plot of land itself
- imara* – the hereditary principality of Mount Lebanon
- iqta‘* – the land-tenure and administrative system in Mount Lebanon, often misleadingly translated as feudalism
- irad-ı cedid* – the fiscal apparatus established to finance the *nizam-ı cedid* military unit
- Islahat Fermanı* – 1856 Reform Decree, the second of the major Tanzimat measures
- izba* – an Egyptian estate where peasants were given a dwelling and land to grow subsistence crops in exchange for labor service on the landlord’s cotton or other cash crops
- Jabal Nablus – a district in the north of the central mountain chain of Palestine
- Janissary Corps – a musket-bearing infantry unit of the Ottoman army
- jiflik* – Arabization of *çiftlik*, an estate given to members of the royal family in mid-nineteenth-century Egypt
- kharajıyya* – peasant lands defined by the 1854 Egyptian land law
- malikâne* – life-term tax farm
- mamluk* (Ar.), *memlûk* (Tur.) – an elite warrior-slave
- mevat* (Tur.), *mawat* (Ar.) – waste or uncultivated land
- milk* (Ar.), *mülk* (Tur.) – privately owned land
- miri* – state-administered land
- mugharasa* – a cultivation contract common in Mount Lebanon: an owner would engage a peasant to plant trees on his land and cultivate them in return for a portion of the land and the trees
- mültezim* (Tur.), *multazim* (Ar.) – holder of a tax farm
- muqata‘a* – a district in the land-tenure and administrative system of Mount Lebanon administered by a hereditary local notable, or *muqata‘aji*
- musha‘a* – collective form of landholding in Syria and Palestine
- musharaka* – sharecropping
- mutamassirun* – permanently resident Greeks, Italians, Armenians, Syrian Christians, and Jews in Egypt

- mutanawwirun* – in Syria, the term for the urban middle strata educated in a western style and adopting European dress
- nizam-ı cedid* – the European-style military unit established by Sultan Selim III (1789–1807)
- Rumelia – the European parts of the Ottoman Empire
- salam* – a contract in which a merchant lends a peasant money and the peasant agrees to deliver a harvest to the merchant in return for a specified price or portion of the proceeds from the sale of the crop
- sarifa* – a hut made from palm branches (Iraq)
- sened-i ittifak* – 1808 Document of Agreement confirming the powers of the provincial notables
- shari‘a* (Ar.), *şeriat* (Tur.) – Islamic law
- Sipahis* – Ottoman cavalry soldiers
- sufi* – a Muslim mystic. Mystical orders (*turuq*) were often mobilized for political and social purposes
- Tanzimat – mid-nineteenth-century elite-initiated legal, administrative, and fiscal reforms of the Ottoman Empire
- timar* – a rural land holding used to support a *sipahi* and his retainers. Larger holdings were called *ziamet* or *hass*.
- tujjar* – long-distance merchants of Cairo
- ‘uhda* – a land grant to a military or civilian official in mid-nineteenth-century Egypt
- ‘ulama’* (Ar.), *ülema* (Tur.) – Muslim scholars
- ‘ushr* (Ar.), *öşür* (Tur.) – Ottoman land tax calculated as a percentage of a crop, variable by region
- ‘ushuriyya* – privileged estates (*ib‘adiyya*, *jiflik*, and *‘uhda*) according to the 1854 Egyptian land law
- wakıf* (Tur.), *waqf* (Ar.) – a public or family endowment established in accord with Islamic law
- Wafd – the leading nationalist party of interwar Egypt, named for the delegation formed to negotiate independence at the Versailles peace conference

## Acronyms and abbreviations

---

- ASP – Arab Socialist Party (Syria)  
 ASU – Arab Socialist Union (Egypt)  
 AWC – Arab Workers' Congress (Ittihad al-ʿUmmal al-ʿArab, Palestine)  
 COLA – cost-of-living allowance  
 CPI – Communist Party of Iraq  
 CUP – Committee of Union and Progress (Ottoman Empire)  
 DİSK – Devrimi İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Revolutionary Trade Unions, Turkey)  
 DMNL – al-Haraka al-Dimuqratiyya lil-Tahrir al-Watani (Democratic Movement for National Liberation, Egypt)  
 DP – Democrat Party (Demokrat Partisi, Turkey)  
 EMNL – al-Haraka al-Misriyya lil-Tahrir al-Watani (Egyptian Movement for National Liberation)  
 FATULS – Ittihad al-Niqabat wa'l-Jamʿiyyat al-ʿArabiyya (Federation of Arab Trade Unions and Labor Societies, Palestine)  
 FLN – Front de Liberation Nationale (National Liberation Front, Algeria)  
 GFETU – General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (al-Ittihad al-ʿAmm li-Niqabat ʿUmmal Misr)  
 JNF – Jewish National Fund  
 JP – Justice Party (Adelet Partisi, Turkey)  
 LP – Labor Party (Egypt)  
 MİSK – Milliyetçi, İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Nationalist Workers' Unions, Turkey)  
 MTWU – Niqabat ʿUmmal al-Sanaʿiʿ al-Yadawiyya (Manual Trades Workers' Union, Egypt)  
 NCWS – al-Lajna al-Wataniyya lil-ʿUmmal wʿal-Talaba (National Committee of Workers and Students, Egypt)  
 NLL – ʿUsbat al-Taharrur al-Watani (National Liberation League, Palestine)  
 PAWS – Jamʿiyyat al-ʿUmmal al-ʿArabiyya al-Filastiniyya (Palestine Arab Workers' Society)  
 PCGFETU – al-Lajna al-Tahdiriyya lil-Ittihad al-ʿAmm li-Niqabat ʿUmmal

- Misr (Preparatory Committee for a General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions)  
PCP – Palestine Communist Party  
PSD – Parti Socialiste Destourien (Destourian Socialist Party, Tunisia)  
RPP – Republican People’s Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, Turkey)  
TLP – Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Turkish Labor Party)  
Türk İş – Türkiye İşçi Sendikaları Konfederasyonu (Confederation of Turkish Trade Unions)  
UAR – United Arab Republic  
UGTA – Union Générale des Travailleurs Algériens (General Union of Algerian Workers)  
UGTT – Union Générale Tunisienne du Travail (General Union of Tunisian Workers)





Egypt and Bilad al-Sham



The Middle East in the Twentieth Century

