

A Tale of Two Villages: Family, Property, and Economic Activity in Rural Egypt in the 1840s

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THE 1840s, WHICH COMPRISED the final years of the rule of Muhammad 'Ali Pasha (1805–48), were a transitional period in the political, economic, and social life of Egypt. The decade began with the settlement of the Turco-Egyptian crisis of 1839–41, entailing the perpetuation of his and his descendants' rule as the governors of a now autonomous Ottoman province,¹ as well as a number of other changes which directly affected the countryside.

The settlement meant the end of three decades of military preparations and campaigning, at a tremendous cost borne mainly by the nine-tenths of the population who were rural. It also required the reduction of the Pasha's armed forces, most of whom were conscript villagers, by more than four-fifths.² A third consequence was the abolition of the 'monopoly system', the statist economic regime by means of which the Pasha controlled the production and distribution of the most important agricultural and industrial products. A more liberal economic

¹ While this political arrangement was less than the independent empire the Pasha had sought, it provided a framework within which distinctly Egyptian (as opposed to Ottoman) administrative, legal, and educational institutions would develop. The nationalist historiography does, however, downplay the continuing Ottomanness of elite political culture and institutions. See Toledano (1990), 21–2.

² The military was reduced from about 120,000 at its height in the 1830s to no more than 18,000. For the text of the agreements that ended the Turco-Egyptian crisis, see Hurewitz (1956), 116–23.

regime gradually took its place, and toward the end of the decade there was even a minor grain boom following the abolition of the Corn Laws in Britain.³

The end of what was in effect a war economy did not bring a reduction in taxation, though some have suggested that reduced conscription and economic liberalisation in this and the following decade led to an improvement in rural conditions.⁴ The question of whether and how conditions improved and for whom remains to be investigated fully, however, and in order to be truly meaningful it also should be posed with due regard for the social and economic structures of the nineteenth-century countryside. It is a commonplace that the two forces for change in this century were the policies of a strong and intrusive state and integration in the world economy. Yet the impact of state policies and the influence of the world economy in the lives of different rural families would have depended to a great extent on their situation, so to speak, in the socio-economic grid.

There is a long and not very useful tradition of treating the rural population as if they were a uniform mass, a single peasant class. This tradition stems from early twentieth-century nationalist discourse, and was carried over into the revolutionary era, during which the old regime was designated as 'feudalist',⁵ Though historical studies since the 1950s have increasingly recognised and analysed social and economic differentiation in the countryside, there is still a tendency to treat the rural population as if they were exclusively engaged in agriculture, and to treat the issue of socio-economic stratification entirely in terms of landholding. This is at least in part due to the ideology of the land reform, which was premised on the notion that an unequal distribution of land was the main cause of rural poverty and underdevelopment.⁶

To be sure, nineteenth-century Egypt was a predominantly agrarian society,

³ On the monopoly system and its abolition see Cuno (1992), 121–46, 179–89.

⁴ Ehud Toledano writes that 'the 1840s and 1850s were, by and large, a good time to be alive in Egypt for members of all strata,' as the period was one of 'much-needed relief from [Muhammad 'Ali's] costly and demanding policy, which society seemed no longer able to sustain'. This is in defence of Muhammad 'Ali's successor, Abbas Pasha (1849–54), who has been maligned as a reactionary who abandoned most of his grandfather's reforms. Here there is more than an echo of earlier debates between the partisans of Muhammad 'Ali's reformism and those of Abbas' Ottoman conservatism. Though the former were more numerous Abbas found a defender in the economic historian Muhammad Fahmi Lahita, who wrote that 'the condition of the peasant (*al-fallah*)' improved as a result of the end of the monopoly system and the reduction of conscription, as well as a halt in public works projects resulting in reduced *corvées* and a lightening of the burden of taxation. See Toledano (1990), 11, and Lahita (1944), 201.

⁵ A pre-revolutionary example is Lahita (see n. 4). In the socialist era 'peasants' (*al-fallahin*) were recognised as one of the 'productive forces' of the country, and guaranteed representation in the ruling party and parliament accordingly.

⁶ On the pre-reform discourse see the final chapter in Baer (1962). The classic case for 'the relationship between land reform and economic development in the region' is made by Warriner (1962), ix and *passim*.

and the possession of land was the most important determinant of the economic status of most rural families. Yet a shortcoming in the current historiography is the near absence of any treatment of non-agricultural economic activities. Hardly anything is known of the extent and variety of non-agricultural specialisations in the nineteenth-century countryside, nor about the relationship of these activities to agriculture, and any changes they may have undergone. For the rural society as a whole, moreover, social stratification and class formation need to be approached in relation to the household, the family, and broader kin relations. Land, after all, was cultivated by households, and transmitted within and between households. What role, if any, did household formation play in the perpetuation or improvement of the status of a family?

This essay presents a detailed profile of two villages in Lower Egypt in the 1940s, as a first step in filling in the above-mentioned gaps in our knowledge, and in an effort to devise a method for doing so. It is intended as a starting-point for the observation of developments, patterns, and correlations which may prove to be indicative of broader social and economic trends. As it is a preliminary venture, its conclusions are necessarily tentative. The essay discusses the villages of Badaway and Damas, in al-Daqahliyya province in the eastern Delta (see map, Figure 14.1), on the basis of data drawn mainly from land and census records, supplemented with evidence from the law-court records of al-Mansura, the provincial capital.⁷ The choice of these villages was dictated to a large extent by my previous research on, and thus my familiarity with, this province. I do not claim that these villages were typical of all villages, for there were important regional differences, especially between Upper and Lower Egypt, and at this point we lack the knowledge to say with certainty what a 'typical' village in even one of those regions would have been like, much less the ability to come up with an archetype. In my view the construction of an archetypal village is an exercise of limited value, since it necessarily de-emphasises one of the more important characteristics of the rural society and economy in past time, namely its variety and changeability.⁸

In this tale of two villages, it will become apparent that no generalisations about the peasantry as an undifferentiated class are adequate, and indeed, that not all villagers were peasants. As for the question of whether conditions were improving in this period, it may have been 'the best of times' for relatively few, and 'the worst of times' for many, depending upon the situation of each family.

⁷ The Sharia (Islamic law) court records of al-Mansura and the land-tax registers are described in detail in Cuno (1992), 68, 216–19. The census registers (*Dafatir ta'dad al-nufus*), are kept in the Egyptian National Archives (Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya) and are described in this article. For a more thorough description of the census registers and their uses see Cuno and Reimer (1997).

⁸ Cf. Berque (1972), 50ff.

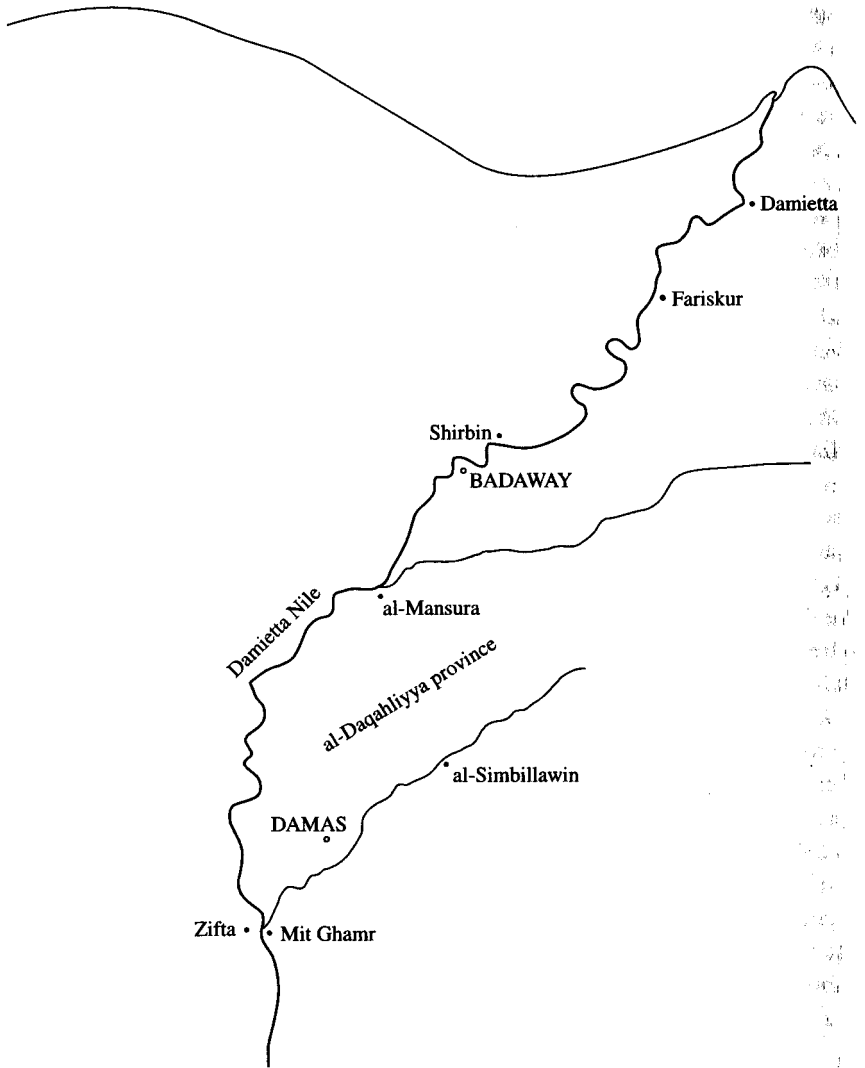


Figure 14.1 The north-eastern Delta.

Prelude: The Redistribution of Peasant-Held Land and Population Trends Under Muhammad 'Ali

During the Ottoman period and well into the nineteenth century, most agricultural (i.e. open field) land was held and cultivated by village households who transmitted it to succeeding generations, usually through the male line.⁹ This land was defined under the Ottomans as *miri* or state revenue land, and would not begin to be converted to private ownership until the 1870s. Legally the villagers held its usufruct contingent on continuous cultivation and the payment of the land tax. Three to ten *feddans* (approximately acres) were sufficient to support a household of five, depending on fertility and the supply of water, and a household with a single adult male could cultivate up to 5 or 6 feddans on a full-time basis. Due to the cultivators' ability to sell, rent, or pawn their usufruct rights, and consistent with the presence of rural markets, urban-rural commerce, cash-crop production, money exchange, and credit, there was probably never anything resembling an equal distribution of land. At the beginning of Muhammad 'Ali's rule, in the region of Badaway and Damas, the amounts held by villagers varied from less than one feddan to more than 50 feddans, though most holdings were of 5 feddans and less, and at least some households were landless.¹⁰

The landless element lacked usufruct rights but were not without access to land. They, as well as those lacking sufficient land for their subsistence, worked the land of their wealthier neighbours by renting or sharecropping. They supplemented the family income with seasonal work during planting and the harvest, and through various non-farming activities (discussed below). Among these peasants, then, only the wealthiest—the larger landholders—were able to live entirely from agriculture.

Many households lost some or all of their land as a direct result of the policies of Muhammad 'Ali. The Pasha's well-known military build-up and campaigns, his administrative reforms, and his investments in agriculture and large-scale industry were costly. Since agriculture was his main source of revenue, the result was a high rate of net taxation, which many landholders were unable to sustain, resulting in the widespread accumulation of land-tax arrears.¹¹ To secure payment of the arrears, officials began in the 1820s to seize and reassign the land of the indebted to those deemed capable of paying. The evidence suggests that a significant amount of land was reassigned to the wealthier rural strata, including the rural notables (*a'yan al-rif*), the most prominent of whom were the village headmen. During the rule of Muhammad 'Ali and later they

⁹ For a discussion of the agrarian administration see Cuno (1992), 17–47.

¹⁰ Cuno (1992), 64–84.

¹¹ Net taxation refers to formal taxation plus the additional amount extracted from agriculture under the monopoly system. See Cuno (1992), 121–46, 153–6.

assisted in tax assessment and collection, in addition to carrying out other duties, and they were compensated with tax exemptions and reductions. Having wealth and access to political power, the rural notables fared well under the Pasha's rule, and prospered in the later nineteenth century.¹²

The accumulation of land-tax arrears also prompted the reintroduction of tax farming, under the rubric of *'uhda*, in the 1830s and 1840s. The tax farmer would receive an entire village as an *'uhda*, paying off its arrears and taking responsibility for its tax in subsequent years. He was given administrative control of the village, and also took direct control of the plots of land in it for which he had paid the arrears. This land was in effect pawned to him, and the original holders could redeem it only by repaying him for the arrears. By the late 1840s, somewhere between a third and two-fifths of the surveyed land was *'uhda*. Although Muhammad 'Ali's successor, Abbas (1849–54), rescinded from two-thirds to three-quarters of the *'uhdas*, returning the land to its previous holders, the remaining land was permanently transferred to those who had paid its arrears. Some of the latter were village headmen.¹³

Yet a third way in which peasant landholders were deprived of their land was through the granting of their villages as privileged estates by Muhammad 'Ali to himself, his family, and other members of the ruling élite. The most extensive grants of village land occurred between 1838 and 1848, most of them going to the ruling family under the rubric of *jiflik*.¹⁴

Our data on landholding in the 1840s must be viewed in the light of these events. Far from representing a 'traditional' situation, in the 1840s the pattern of landholding in Badaway and Damas reflected recent upheavals.

The same may be said with regard to the data that appear in the census registers of this decade. Estimates of the population of Egypt c. 1800 have recently been revised upward to between 3.8 and 4.5 million, by using modern actuarial methods and working backward from the late nineteenth-century censuses. The new studies agree that the population increased under Muhammad 'Ali, though the rate of increase in conjectural, being a matter of the assumed effect of greater internal security and agricultural expansion, as offset by epidemics, conscription, and war.¹⁵ The Pasha's rule was also a period of rural migration. An unknown number of villagers left their homes to escape arrears and/or conscription, and took refuge in other villages, the towns, and even with Arab tribes. European accounts of deserted villages may have been exaggerated out of hostility to the Pasha, but the flight drew official concern and orders to apprehend and return the fugitives were issued regularly from the 1820s through the 1840s.

¹² The rural notables are discussed extensively in Cuno (1992), 85–99, 166–78.

¹³ Cuno (1992), 157–60.

¹⁴ Cuno (1992), 160–4.

¹⁵ See McCarthy (1976) and Panzac (1987).

The number of fugitives who migrated permanently is unknown, however, and so is the extent of voluntary and/or coerced migration to the new lands which were reclaimed in this period.

Although our understanding of population growth and migration in this period is rudimentary at best, it is sufficient to alert us to the fact that, just like the landholding data, the census data portray a society in the midst of change.

The Land-Tax Registers of Badaway and Damas in the 1840s

There are numerous sources for the study of land-tenure at the village level in Lower Egypt in the nineteenth century. For the first half of the century the administrative records include registers from the famous cadaster of 1813–14, as well as a series of land-tax registers from 1815, which are based on the cadaster of the previous year. There is a third group of registers from the second cadaster, which was carried out during 1819–20 and partly redone in 1821. Last, and beginning in the 1840s, there is another series of land-tax registers which continues nearly to the end of the century, the purpose of which was to keep a running account of individual tenures and tax liability.

In each of these series a separate register was compiled for every administratively defined village. Beginning in 1813–14 the land was recorded plot by plot in the names of individual holders, along with the tax due from each plot. The plots were grouped according to the basin (*hawa*) in which they were located, and each basin was shown as part of a village 'quarter' or 'section' (see below).

The registers also indicated the legal status of each plot. In the first three register series the state revenue land was subdivided into three legal categories, as *filaha*, *rizqa* and *usya*.¹⁶ I have loosely translated *filaha* land as 'peasant land', since it was held in usufruct mainly by village households, although outsiders, including urbanites, could also acquire it. *Rizqa* land was village land the income of which was endowed for the support of local religious activities, and usually it too was in the hands of village families. *Rizqa* land appears to have been merged with peasant land by the 1840s, as it no longer appears as a separate category in the land-tax registers.

Usya land consisted of the usufruct holdings of the former tax farmers of the Ottoman era. The old tax farming system was abolished during 1813–14, and replaced with a system of direct taxation of the land—hence the need for such detailed registers. Many of the former tax farmers in Lower Egypt were permitted to retain some or all of their *usya* land, and unlike the peasant land it was not taxed. Its holders were mostly absentees, who leased it to village cultivators. Due to its tax-free status, *usya* land was not recorded in the land-tax

¹⁶ On these and other terms for land, see Cuno (1992), 36–7, 66–9.

registers of the 1840s and later. Similarly, these registers excluded any land which had been granted free of tax to members of the ruling family or officials as *jiflik* or under some other rubric.

The register series through the 1820s also indicated land use, that is whether the land was cultivated (*ma'mur*) or otherwise. However, since the land-tax registers of the 1840s were solely concerned with the state revenue land which was taxed and hence cultivated, this distinction was also absent from them.

A full account of the history of land-tenure in a given village or district would require extensive research in numerous registers from various series, something which is beyond the bounds of this essay. The more modest purpose of this section of the essay is to draw some tentative conclusions about peasant landholding in Badaway and Damas in the 1840s, based on a limited sampling of the cadastral and land-tax registers.

Badaway is one of four adjacent villages sharing the same name, which are located on or near the Damietta (eastern) branch of the Nile to the north of al-Mansura. It and nearby Minyat Badaway are situated on the river, and are long-established villages mentioned in the medieval sources. Badaway was throughout the nineteenth century a rice-producing village, and 'Ali Mubarak, whose information dates from the 1870s, mentions as well the cultivation of cotton and various grains. It was also the site of a weekly market, and possessed a large mosque. To the east and inland are two apparently more recent settlements along the Sharqawiyya canal, which was excavated around 1830: Kafr Badaway al-Jadid and Kafr Badaway al-Qadim. The latter were separated from Badaway administratively at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹⁷

Like Badaway, Damas is an old village mentioned in more than one of the medieval sources. South of al-Mansura and closer to Mit Ghamr, it is situated east of the Damietta Nile between the Umm Salama and Buiyya canals, which were excavated or deepened in the 1820s.¹⁸ This was the heart of the cotton-growing district that developed under Muhammad 'Ali. Unlike Badaway, Damas did not have a weekly market, and its inhabitants probably attended the markets of Mit Ghamr and other nearby villages.

I have located the land-tax and census registers of Badaway from 1844 and 1848, respectively.¹⁹ These registers indicate that Badaway (and other villages) should not be studied in isolation, but rather in the context of inter-village and urban-rural relations. Our data is therefore limited, since there were separate

¹⁷ Ramzi (1994), ii.1.217, 224, 228; Mubarak (1886-89), ix.14; Rivlin (1961), 231; Sharia Court Records of al-Mansura, xlv.50, Rabi' I 1227; and xlvi.92, Rabi' II 1230.

¹⁸ Ramzi (1994), ii.1.255-6; Mubarak (1886-89), xv.20; Rivlin (1961), 230, 232.

¹⁹ Land-tax register: Ministry of Finance Archives (Dar al-Mahfuzat al-'Umumiyya), *Daftar mukallif-nahiyat badaway*, dated 1260 (1844), makhzan 21, ayn 257, no. 7126. Census register: National Archives (Dar al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyya), *Daftar ta'dad nufus nahiyat badaway*, dated 1264 (1848), musalsil 351, old no. 7697.

cadastral, land-tax, and census registers drawn up for Minyat Badaway, Kafr Badaway al-Jadid, and Kafr Badaway al-Qadim due to their status as administratively distinct units.

The land-tax register put the taxed area of Badaway at 1,698 feddans in 1844, while the area held by the individuals listed as landholders came to only some 1,482 feddans. Although there is no notation explaining the discrepancy, the remaining land may have been held by residents of the other nearby villages, and/or by townspeople. Additionally, there were fifteen persons listed, the sum of whose holdings came to 192 feddans, who failed to appear in the census register drawn up four years later. This might be explained in part by a cholera epidemic which struck in the same year that the census was taken,²⁰ though no obvious relatives of the missing landholders appear in the census register. One or more of the missing families might have been wiped out in the epidemic, but others probably resided in nearby villages. Some parcels of land were clearly held by outsiders: two of the missing fifteen and two other landholders are described in the land-tax register as sharing the rights to their plots, which totalled 55 feddans, with 'the people of Kafr Badaway (*sic*)'.

For the village of Damas I have located the land-tax register of 1815, the land-tax register of 1846, and the census register of 1848.²¹ In the cadaster of 1813–14 the cultivated area of Damas was recorded as being 3,429 feddans. Just under three-quarters of this land was peasant land. A quarter of it was *usya* (held by the former tax farmers), and a twelfth was *rizqa* (endowed land). A comparison with the land-tax register of 1846 indicates that a drastic change occurred in the pattern of landholding in this village during the intervening years. Only some 696 feddans remained in the hands of the villagers, as compared to a total of 2,611 feddans of peasant and *rizqa* land recorded in 1815, representing a reduction of about 73 per cent. Although the reason for that is not indicated, some possibilities may be mentioned.

The most likely is that some or all of the missing land was seized to form a royal estate or *jiflik* granted by Muhammad 'Ali to himself or another member of his family. Though a few *jifliks* were created as early as the 1820s, their expansion began in 1838 and continued through 1844. 'Ali Barakat's account shows that some or all of the land of several villages in the cotton-growing districts of al-Daqahliyya province was taken. Although he did not list every village affected, Damas was probably one of them.²²

A less likely possibility is that the boundaries of Damas were administratively

²⁰ Kuhnke (1990), 59ff.

²¹ Land-tax registers: Ministry of Finance Archives, *Daftar tari' nahiyat damas*, dated 1230 (1815), makhzan 21, ayn 178, no. 84; and *Daftar mukallifat nahiyat damas*, dated 1262 (1846), makhzan 21, ayn 283, no 9460. Census register: National Archives, *Daftar ta'dad nufus nahiyat damas*, dated 1264 (1848), musalsil 408, old no. 7,759.

²² Barakat (1977), 87–94.

redrawn, reducing its landed area. This occurred with the administrative creation of 'new' villages like Kafr Badaway al-Qadim and Kafr Badaway al-Jadid, for when satellite settlements such as these were separated from the parent village, the area of the latter was reduced accordingly. Although Damas does not appear to have been affected in this way, some revision of its boundaries may have occurred. A third way in which the peasant-held area in Damas could have been reduced is through the inclusion of some of its land in an *'uhda*, or tax farm. This seems even less likely, however, since *'uhda* land was usually indicated in the land-tax registers of the 1840s. Of course, these possibilities were not mutually exclusive: the peasant-held area of Damas could have been reduced by more than one means.

As in Badaway, some of the land in Damas was held by apparent non-residents. Eight of the landholders, whose holdings came to 77 feddans, failed to appear in the census register, nor were there any obvious kin.

For both villages, the discrepancies between the tax and census registers can probably be resolved by inspecting the equivalent registers of the neighbouring villages. The methodologically important point is that one cannot expect to reach a full understanding of the history of a given village by treating it in isolation. To the extent that urban-rural and inter-village relations were important—and they were—one also has to make use of sources from the neighbouring villages and towns.

Population and Economic Activities

The census registers contain a wealth of information that nicely complements that found in the land-tax registers. Each village register contains an account of all of its residents, broken down into the following categories: Egyptian subjects as opposed to non-Egyptians, including migrants from other Ottoman provinces; and native inhabitants of the village as opposed to migrants from other villages and provinces. Individuals were recorded as living in a particular household (*manzil*),²³ which was identified by the name of the head of the household. The names of the male and female residents of the house were listed, along with the ages they reported and their relationship with the head of the household (Figure 14.2).

Additionally, the households of the native inhabitants were listed as forming part of a village 'section', in the same way that plots of land were shown as belonging to a village section in the land-tax registers. What was called a village section (*hissa*) in the administrative records corresponded to what the judicial records called a 'quarter' (*hara*).²⁴ In a pattern that has persisted into the

²³ *Manzil* refers to the house as a physical structure. The term most often used for a household in the juridical records was *ma'isha*. See the discussion of this term in Cuno (1995), 489.

²⁴ For a discussion of these terms and their relationship see Cuno (1992), 89–92, 169.

mashayikh, *shaykh al-balad*, and from the 1820s, *'umda*) for the entire village. In Muhammad 'Ali's period it appears that the number of administratively recognised sections and hence the number of *skaykhs* in the village was reduced, though many villages continued to consist of more than one section. All the native inhabitants of Badaway in 1848 belonged to a single section headed by the *shaykh* Ahmad 'Ali Abu Sa'da, who was also the village headman or *'umda*.²⁶ There were two sections in Damas, one headed by Sulayman 'Abd al-Rahman, whose son Hijazi was the village headman. The other was known as 'the section of the *usya*' (*hissat al-usya*), with no *shaykh* listed. These *skaykh* families will be discussed below; the village *shaykhs* are important, for they were the main component of the rural notables, the leading political and economic element in the countryside.

Another feature of the census registers is the information they contain on economic activities. The census-takers often recorded the occupation of a male head of household, and occasionally that of one or more of its other adult male members, though no occupations were recorded for women. The recording of occupations may have been connected with the head tax, which, beginning in the 1820s, was levied on the able male population from the age of twelve.²⁷ It may also have been intended to help officials choose men for the *corvée* and conscription.

The registers also contain aggregate accounts of the population of each village section which are broken down by age, sex, religion, and—for the men—occupational category. Unlike the house-by-house account, in this section of the registers every male, regardless of age, was assigned to an occupational category, presumably reflecting that of the head of his household. Another difference is that the occupational categories used in the aggregate accounts are quite broad, consisting only of 'shaykhs and cultivators' (*mashayikh wa fallahin*); 'artisans, tradesmen, and the idle' (*arbab al-sana'i wa al-battalin*); government servants; wounded (discharged) soldiers; and slaves. Though the logic of this method of accounting for occupations is obscure, it must have reflected official priorities.

Badaway was the larger of our two villages, its population coming to 3,183. There were 3,084 native-born inhabitants living in 422 households, plus 54 migrants from other villages and provinces living in an additional 30 households (Table 14.1). The relatively small number of migrants, only 1.7 per cent of the residents of this village, does not conform to the picture of mass rural flight painted by some of the Pasha's critics.

According to the house-by-house account nearly a third of the households of the natives (129 of 422, or 30 per cent) were headed by men who were 'idle'

²⁶ I have written the name Abu Sa'da as it usually appears in the court records and more recent sources. It was written as 'Sa'da' in the census register. On this family see Cuno (1992), 173, 174.

²⁷ Cuno (1992), 132, 134.

Table 14.1 Household structure of Badaway, 1264/1848.

Category	Natives		Migrants		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Solitaries	16	3.79	9	30.00	25	5.53
1a Widowed	15		3		18	
1b Single	1		6		7	
2 No family	2	0.47	0	0.00	2	0.44
2a Coresident siblings	2		0		0	
2b Coresident relations of other kinds	0		0		0	
3 Simple family households	153	36.26	18	60.00	171	37.83
3a Married couples alone	14		3		17	
3b Married couples with child(ren)	111		10		121	
3c Widowers with child(ren)	3		0		3	
3d Widows with child(ren)	25		5		30	
4 Extended family households	80	18.96	0	0.00	80	17.70
4a Extended up	39		0		39	
4b Extended down	1		0		1	
4c Extended laterally	28		0		28	
4d Combinations of 4a-c	12		0		12	
5 Multiple family households	165	39.10	3	10.00	168	37.17
5a Secondary units up	11		0		11	
5b Secondary units down	55		1		56	
5c Secondary units lateral	0		0		0	
5d Frérèches	76		1		77	
5e Other multiple family households	23		1		24	
6 Incompletely classifiable households	6	1.42	0	0.00	6	1.33
Total	422	100.00	30	100.00	452	100.00

Source: Census register of Badaway, 1264/1848.

(*battal*), while 84 households, the second largest number, were headed by a 'cultivator' (*fallah*). Obviously these terms cannot be taken literally. Many of the 'idle' had dependents and were not extremely advanced in age, and only two of them headed households containing a son or brother described as economically active. In the absence of a social welfare system these men cannot have been without employment and an income of some sort. The use of the term 'fallah', which commonly means 'peasant' in modern Arabic, can also be misleading. A comparison of the census and land-tax registers resulted in a very high correlation between the identification of someone as a fallah or 'cultivator' and the

possession of land. Conversely, most of the 'idle' did not have land of their own, although most of them probably worked the land of others as sharecroppers or by some other arrangement, and engaged in other seasonal and part-time work.

Thus it appears that the term 'fallah' was applied routinely to men possessing usufruct rights. The term 'idle' was applied to individuals who were disabled or too old to work, and apparently also to a large residual group who were neither landholders nor non-agricultural specialists, and whose economic activities were therefore not of particular interest to the authorities. Sharecropping seems to have increased in this period as a result of the loss of land by many families under Muhammad 'Ali. However, no sharecroppers are recorded, even though the phenomenon of sharecropping and the vocabulary to describe it certainly existed.²⁸

Nor were women's economic activities recorded, at least in part because women were seldom taxed and not conscripted. Indeed it is surprising that their names were recorded at all, for women were omitted entirely from the census registers compiled in other Ottoman provinces in this period.²⁹ Nevertheless, the economic activities of village women can be documented through other sources such as the court records and travellers' reports. Typically, in addition to housework and raising children, they raised livestock and poultry, spun yarn of wool, flax, and cotton, and sold the industrial and agricultural products they produced in the local markets. In the fields, women and children assisted in the transplanting of rice, weeded and removed diseased leaves and pests from cotton, and assisted in harvesting and processing nearly all crops. Although irrigation, ploughing, and sowing appear to have been male tasks, farming was undertaken by households, not men alone.

The court records necessarily reflect women's economic activities since women were often involved in litigation. They also show that women occasionally acquired land, thereby becoming taxpayers, even though this is not reflected in the land-tax registers, from which women's names are nearly entirely absent. Thus the administrative blindness to women's economic activities which the land-tax and census registers reflect cannot be attributed entirely to their non-payment of taxes, since at least some women, as landholders, did pay taxes. In addition to the authorities' overriding concern with conscription and taxation, then, this bias seems to reflect a widely held notion that peasant land was or at least should be held and cultivated exclusively by men, in spite of the exceptions. This was expressed bluntly by one man who contested a woman's possession of land on the ground that 'females do not cultivate land'.³⁰

Leaving aside absences and returning to what actually appears in the census

²⁸ Cuno (1992), 181.

²⁹ See McCarthy (1979), *passim*.

³⁰ Cuno (1992), 76.

registers, the variety of occupations listed gives a fair impression of the diversity of male economic activities among the inhabitants of Badaway. In addition to those who farmed, other individuals (including migrants) with agriculturally related occupations were the seedsmen, or sowers of grain (*bazzar*, 13), and the winnowers (*mudarri*, 10). The curious thing about these occupational definitions is that they refer to seasonal work. Even if these men migrated for work during the planting and harvest seasons, they probably engaged in other activities during the rest of the year. Less surprising, in a village on the Nile, is the presence of boatmen (*marakbi (sic)*, 24) and fishermen (*sayyad*, 7).

The market of Badaway was held on Saturday, where according to somewhat later sources various grains and herbs (*al-'atara*), fish, fowl, clothing, and other goods were sold.³¹ Confirming the existence of this market in the 1840s, there were a large number of retailers (*musabbib*, 20) and tradesmen (or 'sellers', *bayya'*, 5), as well as 2 butchers (*jazzar*) and 3 chicken-sellers (*fararji*). There were relatively fewer artisans: 6 millers (*tahhan*), 4 builders (*banna*), 8 carpenters (*najjar*), 2 other carpenters specialising in water-wheels (*najjar sawaqi'*), which were necessary for irrigating rice and cotton, a blacksmith (*haddad*), and 7 Coptic jewellers. Three men were listed as camel-drivers (*jammal*) and 5 as porters (*hammal*). Eight men worked outside their homes as servants (*khaddam*), six of whom were employed by the Abu Sa'da family, and another man served as their cook. There were 7 *fiqis*, the colloquial term for one who performed religious duties, including the teaching and recitation of the Qur'an. The village was also served by 3 barbers (*muzayyin*) and a druggist ('*attar*'). Those with official duties included a judge (*qadi*), a tax collector (*sarraf*), a guard of water-wheels (*ghafir sawaqi'*), and three *mashadds*, who were a kind of village police.³²

Even assuming that many of the 'idle' were actually employed in agriculture, Badaway had a significant number of households engaged in non-agricultural pursuits. Moreover, some households contained men with different occupations. For example, in the household of the judge, Shaykh 'Isa Ashur, one of his brothers was a servant of the Abu Sa'da family, and another a fallah. Presumably the latter farmed the family's land, which came to 6 feddans. Yusuf Ishaq, a fallah, also possessed 6 feddans. His household included, among others, three brothers who were boatmen and a nephew who was a *fiqi*. A household headed by a retailer included his three brothers who were boatmen, and still another headed by a fallah, who held 3 feddans, included two sons, a fallah and a carpenter. In the two households in which a fallah coresided with brothers who were engaged in non-agricultural activities—and assuming the land to be inherited, each of the brothers having an equal share in it—it is likely that the non-farming brothers ceded or entrusted their shares to the one identified as the fallah. In each case

³¹ Mubarak (1886–89), ix.14; Fikri (1879), 51.

³² See Rivlin (1961), 99.

the amount of land involved was 6 feddans, which was sufficient to support two families at the most, and required the labour of no more than one full-time cultivator. Similarly, the 3 feddans held by the last household would have been sufficient to support only one family, which may be the reason why one of the two sons became a carpenter. Though the listing of multiple occupations in one household was not very frequent, it illustrates the point that not all households were commodity production units. Additionally, it shows that when it came to one's occupation, a son did not always follow in the footsteps of his father.

The aggregate account of the 'shaykhs and cultivators' in Badaway provides us with a rough idea of the available agricultural labour force in this village (Table 14.2). Assuming that the agricultural labour force would have consisted of males who reported their ages as 11 to 60, the number came to 647. On the basis that an adult male could farm 5 to 6 feddans the labour force was sufficient to cultivate anywhere from 3,235 feddans to 3,882 feddans, which was around twice the taxed area. This result indicates, again, the importance of inter-village relations. Prior to 1813-14 the Abu Sa'da family held the tax farm of portions of the nearby villages of Minyat Badaway and Taranis al-Bahr, and they may well have retained some of the *usya* in those villages afterward. The extra labour in Badaway was probably employed in farming those and other lands in the surrounding villages. It is also possible that the former tax farmers of Badaway itself retained substantial amounts of *usya* land, which was not listed in the land-tax register since it was not taxed, but which also would have provided employment for some of the village labour force.

The labour surplus in Badaway is consistent with the relatively low number of migrants noted earlier. While that low number could be attributed to the effectiveness of government measures in returning fugitives to their native villages, fugitive cultivators were more likely to be drawn to districts where labour was relatively scarcer.

Table 14.2 Estimate of the land cultivable by the *fallahin* of Badaway, 1260-64/1844-48.

	N. Shaykhs & <i>fallahin</i> aged 11-60	Amount of land held (feddans)	Amount of land that could be cultivated (feddans)*
All in the section of Ahmad Ali Abu Sa'da	647	1290	3235-3882
Land of persons not found in the census		192	
Land unaccounted for		216	
Total	647	1698	3235-3882

*Calculated as 5 to 6 feddans per cultivator.

Sources: Land-tax register of Badaway, 1260/1844; census register of Badaway, 1264/1848.

In 1848 the population of Damas was recorded as 1,693. There were 1,554 natives of the village living in 265 households: the section of Sulayman Abd al-Rahman comprised 519 persons in 82 households, and the 'section of the *usya*' 1,035 persons in 183 households (Table 14.3). Seventy-four Egyptian migrants, or 4.4 per cent of the residents, lived in 20 households. There were also 65 non-Egyptians, who were in this case Ottoman subjects from provinces other than Egypt. The last category comprised 11 households, in addition to which 6 guards and 4 scribes employed by the *usya* were not noted as belonging in any household. Two of the Ottomans were officials in charge of the *usya*, and one was a *mamluk* or military slave of Muhammad 'Ali. Their presence indicates that the *usya* land in this village was held by a member of the ruling family, perhaps the Pasha himself.

Occupations were noted less often in the census register of Damas than in Badaway, most men having no recorded occupation. Of those that were recorded the largest number of households were headed by fallahs (38). Individuals with other recorded occupations, in addition to those already mentioned, included 2 butchers, 3 *fiqis*, an employee of the mosque, 3 carpenters, a builder, a barber, a shearer (*qassas*), a retailer, and a servant. Compared to Badaway, the more limited occupational diversity in Damas may have been due to its smaller size, its inland location, and the absence of a market.

The agricultural labour force in the section of Sulayman 'Abd al-Rahman appears to have been inadequate to cultivate all the land held by its members, while the opposite situation prevailed in the section of the *usya* (Table 14.4), making it likely that some of the surplus labour in the latter section was employed in cultivating the land in the former. The difference between the land held by all the villagers and the estimated amount that could be cultivated is in the range of 589 to 846 feddans. The larger figure is not far from the area of cultivated *usya* land recorded in 1815, namely 817 feddans. Although the extent of the *usya* in the 1840s is unknown, it is evident that a significant amount of it survived in this village, and it probably provided employment for most if not all of the labour that was not used to farm the peasant land.

Household Structure and Economic Activity

The house-by-house accounting of the population in the census registers permits an analysis of household structure in relation to economic activity, and the land-tax registers also allow us to correlate household structure with landholding. A household is a group of kin eating and living together under the same roof or in the same compound. In that sense all households are consumption units. In pre-modern agrarian societies such as this one, the men in most households worked together in one principal economic activity, and in that sense households

Table 14.3 Household structure of Damas, 1264/1848.

Category	Hissat Sulayman		Hissat al-Usya		Migrants		Outsiders		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1 Solitaries	8	9.76	11	6.00	6	30.00	1	9.09	26	08.78
1a Widowed	4		8		4		0		16	
1b Single	4		3		2		1		10	
2 No family	1	1.22	3	1.64	1	5.00	0	0.00	5	01.69
2a Coresident siblings	1		3		0		0		4	
2b Coresident relations of other kinds	0		0		1		0		1	
3 Simple family households	35	42.68	90	49.18	11	55.00	7	63.64	143	48.31
3a Married couples alone	4		5		1		2		12	
3b Married couples with child(ren)	24		62		9		5		100	
3c Widowers with child(ren)	0		0		0		0		0	
3d Widows with child(ren)	7		23		1		0		31	
4 Extended family households	16	19.51	35	19.13	0	0.00	2	18.18	53	17.90
4a Extended up	14		21		0		1		36	
4b Extended down	0		0		0		0		0	
4c Extended laterally	2		11		0		0		13	
4d Combinations of 4a-c	0		3		0		1		4	
5 Multiple family households	22	26.83	43	23.50	2	10.00	1	9.09	68	22.97
5a Secondary units up	0		3		0		0		3	
5b Secondary units down	14		21		2		0		37	
5c Secondary units lateral	0		0		0		0		0	
5d Frèrèches	6		14		0		1		21	
5e Other multiple family households	2		5		0		0		7	
6 Incompletely classifiable households	0	0.00	1	0.55	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	0.34
Total	82	100.00	183	100.00	20	100.00	11	100.00	296	99.99

Source: Census register of Damas, 1264/1848.

Table 14.4 Estimate of the land cultivable by the *fallahin* of Damas, 1264/1848.

	N. Shaykhs & <i>fallahin</i> aged 11–60	Amount of land held (feddans)	Amount of land that could be cultivated (feddans) ^a
Section of Sulayman 'Abd al-Rahman	85	576	425–510
Section of the Usya	172	43	860–1032
Land of persons not found in the census		77	
Total	257	696	1285–1542

^aCalculated as 5 to 6 feddans per cultivator.

Sources: Land-tax register of Damas, 1262/1846; census register of Damas, 1264/1848.

were also production units, though as we have seen there were exceptions to this.³³

In analysing household structure in Badaway and Damas I have reorganised the census data in conformity with the widely accepted classification scheme of E. A. Hammel and Peter Laslett, which was designed for cross-cultural comparison.³⁴ The main categories in this scheme are: (1) *solitaries*; (2) '*no family*' households, consisting of unmarried relations; (3) *simple family households*, containing a single conjugal family unit (CFU), a category which includes the 'nuclear family' household; (4) *extended family households*, which contain a single CFU plus at least one unmarried relation outside it, such as a parent, sibling, or grandchild; and (5) *multiple family households*, also known as 'joint family' households, which contain two or more related CFUs. Unfortunately for our purposes, the Hammel and Laslett scheme does not take account of polygamy (discussed below). We may eventually find it necessary to modify the classification system accordingly, but for now I have classified polygamous households together with the others by defining a man with one or more wives as one CFU. Thus a few of the households that I have placed in the simple family household category contain a man and two wives.

Societies have a propensity to form one or another type of household, or in other words to be characterised by a certain household formation system. Household formation systems are neither immutable nor independent social variables. Rather, they influence and are influenced by the prevailing systems of marriage and inheritance. For example, simple household formation systems, which have prevailed since pre-modern times in north-western Europe, have been associated with relatively late marriage for men and impartible inheritance. On

³³ Hajnal (1983), 67–8, 99–100.

³⁴ Hammel and Laslett (1974), *passim*.

the other hand a variety of multiple family household (MFH) formation systems prevailed in the rest of pre-industrial Eurasia. In an MFH system the majority of households will usually still be simple family households. The distinguishing feature of an MFH system is the propensity of simple family households to evolve into MFHs or joint households, so that 'the majority of people [are] members of joint households at some stage in their lives.'³⁵ MFH systems have been associated with relatively early marriage for men, patrilocality, and partible inheritance. I have argued elsewhere that there was an MFH formation system in nineteenth-century rural Egypt, where there also was a partible system of inheritance of peasant land, and marriage was usually patrilocal.³⁶

Studies of household formation have also noted differences in household formation patterns between social classes. In agrarian societies there is, for example, a correlation between household complexity and size and the amount of property possessed, especially land. This appears to hold true in rural Egypt today, and the evidence suggests that this pattern has persisted from earlier times.³⁷

A multiple family household can only be formed when the head of a family commands sufficient resources to support a relatively large number of persons. When the household is also a production unit, as often occurs in agriculture, the formation of an MFH is also a means of acquiring an adequate labour force. In rural Egypt the preference for MFH formation also appears to have entailed a 'strategy of heirship' in relation to the system of peasant land-tenure. Before 1858 only the sons of a landholder had an undisputed right to inherit his or her usufruct rights. Two or more sons might divide the land, but by remaining in a single household they kept the holding intact. Usually the oldest took over as the head of the household and the manager of the family's land.³⁸

If the brothers separated and divided the land they exposed their lineage to the risk of eventually losing some or all of it. The head of a non-polygamous simple family household had as high as a 40 per cent probability of not being survived by a son, but rather by a daughter or no proximate heirs at all. Indeed, women usually inherited land in this period as 'substitutes' for an absent male heir, but this was not guaranteed and if it occurred it was likely to be contested by the agnates. On the other hand an MFH, having two or more conjugal family units, was more likely to produce male heirs capable of taking up the land.³⁹

Polygamy, as we shall see, was closely related to MFH formation. It was also a function of wealth, since a polygamous man had to support from two to four wives—the limit in Islamic law—as well as their children, and if he also

³⁵ Hajnal (1983), 69.

³⁶ Cuno (1995), *passim*.

³⁷ Cuno (1995), 487.

³⁸ Cuno (1995), 489–91. On the concept of 'strategies of heirship' see Goody (1973).

³⁹ Cuno (1995), 491–3.

divorced and remarried he would have even more dependents. Nevertheless polygamy was a way of increasing the family labour force and of increasing the possibility of having male heirs.

The household structure of Badaway, shown earlier in Table 14.1, was markedly biased toward multiple family households. Among the natives of the village the MFHs were more numerous than simple family households and accounted for about two-fifths of the total. Although this is but a static 'snapshot' of a changing situation, a sense of the direction in which the domestic cycle moved can be gained by looking at the simple family households. Among the natives of the village nearly three-quarters of the simple family households consisted of couples with one or more children. This type of household could evolve directly into an MFH with the marriage of a son before his father's death. A third of the MFHs were evidently the result of such an evolution, as they consisted of a couple with one or more married sons (secondary units down). The largest number of MFHs (more than two-fifths) were *frèresches*, that is consisting of two or more married brothers. The category 'other multiple family households' contains those which were more complex, being combinations of the other types of MFHs.

A comparison of the land-tax and census registers shows that in Badaway, the correlation between household complexity and landholding was strong indeed. In 1844 the household of the village headman, Ahmad 'Ali Abu Sa'da, held 725 feddans. It seems likely that this family holding was enlarged during the rule of Muhammad 'Ali through the reassignment of the land of others unable to pay their taxes. No other holding in the village came close to this in size, though there were several other holdings much larger than the 3 to 10 feddans needed for the subsistence of a family of five. However, most of the families in Badaway were landless.

Commensurate with its wealth, the Abu Sa'da household was immense, comprising 55 persons in 1848. It was a multiple family household consisting of four generations, the reported ages of whom ranged from less than 1 year to 90. There were nine conjugal family units in the two middle generations: the headman Ahmad 'Ali Abu Sa'da, his wives and children, a brother, a half-brother, and a cousin along with their wives and children, and his retired father and paternal uncles plus their wives and children. There were also 3 slaves in this household, which was the only slave-holding household in the two villages. Along with the servants they employed this was another sign of their wealth.⁴⁰

Excluding the Abu Sa'da household, which was exceptional, the correlation between household complexity and landholding in Badaway was still strong (Table 14.5). Nearly three-quarters of the remaining landholding households were

⁴⁰ Though slave-ownership by rural notables became more common in the 1860s, in the 1840s it was relatively unusual. See Baer (1969), 165-6.

Table 14.5 Landholding households in Badaway, 1264/1848.^a

Category	Households		Landholdings		Mean Fed.
	N	%	Fed.	%	
3 Simple family households	9	13.24	46	8.14	5.11
3a Married couples alone	1		5		
3b Married couples with child(ren)	6		35		
3c Widowers with child(ren)	1		3		
3d Widows with child(ren)	1		3		
4 Extended family households	8	11.76	44	7.79	5.50
4a Extended up	3		14		
4c Extended laterally	4		24		
4d Combinations of 4a-c	1		6		
5 Multiple family households	50	73.53	469	83.01	9.38
5a Secondary units up	3		65		
5b Secondary units down	14		81		
5d Frèresches	22		172		
5e Other multiple family households	11		151		
6 Incompletely classifiable households	1	1.47	6	1.06	6.00
Total	68	100.00	565	100.00	8.31

^aExcluding the household of the village headman.

Sources: Land-tax register of Badaway, 1260/1844; census register of Badaway, 1264/1848.

MFHs in control of more than four-fifths of the remaining land. To put it somewhat differently, apart from the village headman's household there were 19 households in possession of 10 feddans or more, all but three of which were MFHs. The three exceptions were simple family households consisting of couples with children, which were likely to evolve into MFHs.

Some of the non-agricultural specialists had a similar tendency to form MFHs. Half of the 18 households headed by retailers were MFHs, and another 7 consisted of couples with children. Nine of the 16 households headed by boatmen were MFHs, and 4 consisted of couples with children. Four of 5 households headed by fishermen were MFHs, and the remaining one consisted of a couple with children. In these cases the pattern of household formation might also be explained in terms of wealth and the need for labour, although we know so little about the status and wealth of these groups that this is speculative. It is not clear, for example, whether the term 'boatman' was used for all mariners or only for shipowners, and likewise there must have been economic differences among the retailers, who would have specialised in different goods, but for the present these differences remain obscure.

Unlike the natives of Badaway, none of the migrants were landholders and only a few practised recognised occupations. Thirty per cent of them were solitaries and a sixth were widows with children. However, a third of the migrant

households consisted of couples with children, and a tenth were MFHs, suggesting that as they became established they would replicate the household formation pattern of the natives.

Slightly fewer than a tenth of the households in Badaway were polygamous (40 out of 452),⁴¹ and all but one were formed by natives of the village. Predictably, most polygamous households were MFHs (75 per cent), while a smaller though significant proportion (15 per cent) consisted of couples with children. It is striking that just under half the polygamous households (19) were headed by men who were designated as fallahs and/or who held land. Two households headed by boatmen and two others headed by millers were polygamous, while no other recognised occupation accounted for more than one polygamous household. Thus there was a high but not an exclusive correlation between polygamy and landholding. Only four polygamous households contained more than one polygamous man, and all of those were landholding households. In this as in all other respects the Abu Sa'da household was exceptional in containing five polygamous men: the *'umda* Ahmad 'Ali Abu Sa'da had two wives, his father had four, and three of his paternal uncles each had two. Each of the other households contained two men with two wives.

The household structure of Damas, shown earlier in Table 14.3, was relatively more biased toward simple family households, which accounted for nearly half (47 per cent) of the households among the native villagers. However, more than two-thirds of these simple family households consisted of couples with children, which were likely to evolve into MFHs. MFHs still came to a fourth of all households among the native villagers.

In Damas, also, there was a positive correlation between the complexity of households and the amount of land held. The household of the village headman, Hijazi 'Abd al-Rahman, was the largest with 41 persons. It was an MFH comprising three generations and containing four conjugal family units: his father Sulayman, his wives and their children, three of whom were sons (including Hijazi) with their wives and children. This household possessed 350 feddans, which, as in the case of the Abu Sa'da family, may have been enlarged during the previous thirty years by the reassignment of the land of others who had fallen in arrears. The next largest holding in the village was 33 feddans.

Excluding the 'Abd al-Rahman household, there was still a strong correlation between household complexity and landholding in Damas (Table 14.6). Seventeen MFHs accounted for nearly half the remaining landholding households and close to three-quarters of the land held. In addition to the headman's household there were eight households in possession of ten or more feddans,

⁴¹ Heretofore the earliest data indicating the extent of polygamy in Egypt came from the census of 1917, in which there were 4.8 per cent more married women than married men, and the assumption has been that that proportion of the men were polygamous. See Goode (1963), 104.

Table 14.6 Landholding households in Damas, 1264/1848.^a

Category	Households		Landholdings		Mean Fed.
	N	%	Fed.	%	
1 Solitaries	1	2.86	<1	0.40	<1.00
1b Single	1		<1		<1.00
3 Simple family households	12	34.29	40	16.06	3.33
3b Married couples with child(ren)	11		39		3.55
3d Widows with child(ren)	1		<1		<1.00
4 Extended family households	5	14.29	22	8.84	4.40
4a Extended up	4		33		8.25
4c Extended laterally	1		9		9.00
5 Multiple family households	17	48.57	186	74.70	10.94
5b Secondary units down	7		71		10.14
5d Frèresches	7		93		13.29
5e Other multiple family households	3		22		7.33
Total	35	100.01	249	100.00	7.11

^aExcluding the household of the village headman.

Sources: Land-tax register of Damas, 1262/1846; census register of Damas, 1264/1848.

and all but one of them were MFHs. In this village there were hardly enough non-agricultural specialists listed to allow a comparison of household formation, though the tendency to form MFHs does not seem to have been less. Here the 15 polygamous households came to about 5 per cent of the total, and all but two were formed by natives. Six were MFHs and 5 consisted of couples with children. Landholding families accounted for 6 polygamous households, the largest number identifiable by economic activity. Only the household of the *'umda* contained more than one polygamous man: Hijazi, with three wives, and his father 'Abd al-Rahman, with four.

The patterns of household formation in Badaway and Damas were thus broadly similar. A multiple family household formation system was characteristic of both villages, and within them the tendency to form MFHs was especially strong among those families in possession of ten or more feddans—that is, more than what a single adult male could cultivate as well as more than what was needed for the subsistence of a family of five persons. Polygamy, which was closely linked to MFH formation, was also more widespread among the landholding families than among any other group identifiable by economic activity. Our data also indicated at least a certain propensity for MFH formation among the landless and the non-agricultural specialists, something which is less easily explained in terms of economic strategies, in part because we know much less about these groups at the present.

Conclusion

One of the pitfalls to guard against in using quantitative sources such as the land-tax and census registers is the temptation to regard the data they contain as complete and highly accurate. We have already seen, however, that these sources are as remarkable for the information they omit as for what they contain. As administrative sources they reflect the cultural perceptions as well as the political priorities of the men who produced them. These men were either blind to or uninterested in the economic activities of women and certain men, and one has to turn to other sources to document those activities.

The question of accuracy is a vexing one for all quantitative historical sources. In Egypt in this period there is evidence of the concealment of landholdings from the surveyors in order to avoid taxation,⁴² and it would not be surprising if there were also some fraudulent reporting during the census in order to avoid the conscription of a son or to evade the head tax. Since the village shaykhs provided information to the surveyors, it is easy to understand how they could have concealed some land. They appear to have served also as informants in the census, since their testimony to the accuracy of the information contained is inscribed at the end of each register, and they were subject to severe punishment for providing false information.⁴³

The thoroughness of those who collected the information is impressive, a case in point being the recording of women's names. In the village registers I have inspected the totals for both sexes were close, and at times the females outnumbered the males, which indicates that there was no undercounting of females. Nor are there any other internal inconsistencies in either the land or census registers which would suggest extensive fraud or sloppiness. In any event, the foregoing analysis of landholding and household structure does not stand or fall on the absolute accuracy of the sources, since its purpose is to observe developments, patterns, and correlations which may indicate broader trends, and by all indications our data are sufficient for that.

As for what the data showed, while Badaway and Damas had a number of features in common the differences between these villages are suggestive of the variety that could be found in the nineteenth-century countryside. With its market and access to the river, Badaway had a more diverse population in terms of economic activity than Damas, which appears to have been largely a village of cultivators. Moreover, if landholding, household complexity and size, and polygamy are indicative of wealth, then Badaway was a much more prosperous village than Damas, which appears to have suffered the loss of much of its

⁴² Artin (1883), 289–91, and Cuno (1992), 194.

⁴³ Some shaykhs were imprisoned for supplying false information to the census (personal communication from Kalid Fahmy).

peasant-held land in the preceding decades. This should serve, again, to caution us against putting too much stock in the construction of a village archetype.

Deindustrialisation is one of the main themes of nineteenth-century Egyptian history even though no thorough study of it has been undertaken. Perhaps in light of the data in the census registers the question should be recast in terms of the extent to which non-agricultural activities persisted and new ones appeared in the countryside, something for which there are indications later in the century. For example, Mubarak's *Khitat* mentions various industries in the villages in the 1870s, and Amici's population count from the same decade lists 17 per cent of the male population of the provinces as practising 'diverse professions' other than farming and religious functions, while in the 1917 census more than 5 per cent of the provincial population of both sexes was classified as employed in industry, transport, and commerce.⁴⁴ The latter figures are very crude but they are indicative of an important area of economic activity that has not received adequate attention.

In spite of the preliminary nature of this study, it seems safe to conclude that a multiple family household formation system prevailed in the nineteenth century, since in pointing in this direction the evidence found in the census registers is entirely consistent with that found in other sources, such as juridical sources, legislation, and travellers' reports. Moreover, the strong correlation found between MFH formation and landholding is consistent with the ethnographic literature on modern Egypt as well as with studies of household formation in other agrarian societies.⁴⁵

A factor in household formation that has not been addressed so far in this essay is cultural preference. Though economic strategies are important, by themselves they cannot explain all social behaviour. Cultural preference, or conformity to a cultural ideal, may partly explain MFH formation among the landless and non-agricultural specialists, as well as among the landed element. For example, the Abu Sa'da family were tax farmers at the beginning of the century, and to a certain extent their preference for forming a large MFH may have been in emulation of the ruling class and bourgeois culture usually associated with the tax farming element. The latter culture was characterised by large households containing family, slaves, and retainers, and its emulation by the rural notables may have associated MFHs with wealth and status in rural society as well. It is already evident that the notables emulated ruling- and upper-class culture in other ways: their women wore face-veils, and from about the 1840s they began to

⁴⁴ For the use of Mubarak's *Khitat* see Berque (1972), 56–7. The figures from Amici and the 1917 census exclude the major cities organised as governorates, but not the smaller towns of the provinces or *mudiriyyas*. Amici (1879), i.115, 121; Government of Egypt (1919), 20.

⁴⁵ See Cuno (1995), 486–7, 489–93, 495–6. Robert Wheaton discusses the issue of cultural preference in the European context in (1975), 610–11.

adopt the distinctive *Rumi* style of architecture which Muhammad 'Ali had introduced.⁴⁶

For the rural notables in particular, further changes in the rural economy and in the laws governing land-tenure and inheritance appear to have affected the pattern of household formation, the extent of polygamy, and even the choice of spouses.⁴⁷ The Abu Sa'da and 'Abd al-Rahman families exemplified the rural notables' success in thus preserving if not improving their economic status while maintaining access to political power. The Abu Sa'da family held the position of shaykh or '*umda*' in Badaway from the early nineteenth century to at least the mid-twentieth century. Ahmad 'Ali Abu Sa'da was elected to Egypt's first parliament-like body, the Assembly of Delegates, in 1881, and is said to have held about 1,000 feddans. One of his successors served in the Parliament during 1938–42.⁴⁸ Although we know less about the 'Abd al-Rahman family of Damas, they evidently maintained their status, for one Mahmud Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman, described as 'one of the shaykhs and '*umd*s' of Damas, was a member of Nasser's National Union in 1958.⁴⁹

The evidence suggests that the position of these and other notable families was so enhanced during Muhammad 'Ali's rule that their subsequent rise to national prominence is hardly surprising. For this stratum, at least, the 1840s were 'the best of times', and there were even better times to come.

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⁴⁶ Cuno (1992), 176–7.

⁴⁷ Cuno (1995), 495–8.

⁴⁸ Cuno (1992), 173.

⁴⁹ Government of Egypt (1959), 168.

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